THE LAND OF THE CAMEL

Tents and Temples of Inner Mongolia

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THE LAND OF THE CAMEL

Tents and Temples of Inner Mongolia

By

SCHUYLER CAMMANN

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To Marcia

WHO WAITED

FOREWORD

This book describes western Inner Mongolia in 1945. For almost nine years this region had been cut off by hostilities with the Japanese, which began there in 1936, and it will probably be a very long time before any American can get there again. Even before the war it was little known, as the distance from the China coast had prevented foreign contacts, except for a handful of missionaries. The war years had brought marked changes to Inner Mongolia, accelerating the exploitation, terrorization, and dispossession of the Mongols which the Chinese had begun some forty years before. Enough Mongols were still living there, however, to enable us to see and share their life in tents and temples, after the end of the war brought us leisure from other activities. It seemed important to write down what we saw of their strange customs and complex religion, as well as to describe the forces that were undermining their old traditions and their way of life. Thus this is primarily an account of the Mongols we met, and their opponents among the immigrant settlers and border officials. But it would not present a complete picture of the region if it did not also describe the semifeudal realm of the Belgian missionary fathers, which has now passed into history.

Most of Chapter 10 has previously been published in the *Bulletin of the University Museum,* Philadelphia, while some of the passages dealing with Mongolian chess have appeared in an article for *Natural History.* The writer is especially grateful to Walter Hill and to Dr. William LaSor for their kindness in allowing him to use their photographs.

SCHUYLER CAMMANN

University of Pennsylvania
September, 1950

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The Land of the Camel

1

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF MONGOLIA

ON a hot, clear day in August 1945, several members of the U.S. Navy found themselves aboard a clumsy river scow, hundreds of miles from the sea, at the entrance to Mongolia. We felt somewhat out of place, but were thoroughly enjoying our new experiences. An hour or so before, we had driven by truck through the northwestern arm of the Great Wall of China, and finding this ferry at the town of Shih-chieh-shan, we were crossing the swirling brown flood of the Yellow River to enter the Ordos Desert of Inner Mongolia.

The ferry boat was crudely built of logs split lengthwise to form rough planks. Our heavy six-by-six truck, straddling her amidships, made her very top-heavy. The truck had blocks under its wheels so it would not roll overboard, but it lurched dangerously as the scow wallowed in the crosscurrents of mid-river. The sweating coolies at the bow sweep strained to make headway, and the steersman in the stern had a fatalistic expression as though he were sure we would not make the other shore. I tried not to think about what would happen if the blocks slipped, or if the boat turned turtle. In addition to all our own equipment, the truck had a valuable cargo of supplies for an American outpost, and I was responsible for getting it there.

Thinking back, I had little realized that I was getting in for anything like this when, three months before, my commanding officer in Chungking had first broached the idea of a trip to Suiyuan Province in Inner Mongolia. After describing to me the objectives of his mission, he said that since I knew Chinese and had once traveled in Suiyuan before the War, he wanted me to come along as his interpreter.

I was surprised and delighted. For once I was to have a job that would have some relation to past experiences. Best of all, it would offer an opportunity to learn more of the life of the Mongols, which I had barely glimpsed in that brief summer's trip nine years before.

The commander had hoped to leave almost immediately, but one obstacle after another turned up to delay our departure. Finally on the first of July, we left Chungking in a small convoy, on the first leg of a long and interesting journey up through back-country China. About two weeks later we reached Sian, our halfway point, and while we waited there to conduct some business and check over our motors, the commander received orders to remain in Sian for special duty. As I was next in rank, he put me in charge of what was left of the convoy, a single heavy truck with nine Americans, including a doctor, a magician, and a motor mechanic—he had believed in being prepared for any eventuality—and ordered me to continue on to our original destination, a small weather station near Shanpa in Suiyuan.

By now, Sian itself was already some five hundred miles behind us, and the truck had come three times that distance with only the usual minor troubles to be expected while traveling in China off the beaten track. Our luck seemed too good to last, and if it should fail us now, in this god-forsaken place, far beyond the borders of China proper, we would have no way of salvaging either truck or cargo. But there was no point in worrying over what might happen; I kept my fingers crossed and tried to concentrate on the scenery.

This stretch of the Yellow River separated the fertile, reclaimed farmlands of central Ninghsia Province that had long been cultivated by the Chinese, from the Ordos Desert portion of Suiyuan Province. The latter was still largely Mongol territory, part of the real Inner Mongolia. Even from mid-river, we could see strong contrasts between the two regions and their differing ways of life.

Although the town we had just left was itself at the edge of a semidesert, stretching away to the north, it had enough willow trees and surrounding garden plots to give an impression of lush greenness in contrast to the bare sand and rock on the far shore.

There, a low, rocky ridge rose fairly sharply from the beach, making a natural wall that shut off the desert. The ridge was broken at one point, above a small cluster of adobe inn-buildings that marked the ferry landing, but the pass had been partially closed by a wall of mud and stone with crenellations. This was pierced by a round gate—literally the old Gate to Inner Mongolia.

The un-Chinese character of the wall was emphasized by a tall, white *chorten,* a Mongolian religious monument, which towered above

it from over the archway of the gate. The simple lines and clean whiteness of the chorten made a marked contrast to the very drab, yet overdecorated Chinese pagoda of baked mud on the shore behind us. Upriver, a high mountain projected from the range that extended along the northeastern horizon. About halfway up its almost vertical face, we could just make out a horizontal line of one-story, boxlike buildings, with a massive, equally square structure in the center. All were white, with a strip of red painted around the upper portion, looking clean and severely plain at this distance.

Even before the steersman told me what it was, I recognized it as a lama temple. Both the buildings and their choice of location looked very Tibetan, as indeed they were; for the Mongols, when they borrowed the Lama religion from the Tibetans, three centuries ago, had absorbed a lot of foreign cultural elements along with it. Without having visited this particular temple, I knew from previous travels in eastern Inner Mongolia and along the borders of Tibet that the interior of this lama shrine would have gilded images, vividly colored paintings, and fine, brocaded hangings.

"Any chance of stopping for some pictures"? asked Walter Hill, an amateur photographer. His question echoed my own thoughts. I was eager to see the place, and have the others see it, as an introduction to Mongolia. Unfortunately, the steersmen said it was some distance off the main road, down a dubious ox-track where we might get stuck in the sand, and we had already been delayed long enough in the long journey from Chungking. For the time being, we had to be content with this distant view.

When the ferry grounded on the far bank, and the doctor—who doubled as alternate truck driver—got the six-by-six safely ashore, we had a long wait. It would be some time before the other scow arrived with our trailer and the extra crates of gear, unloaded to lighten the truck. Meanwhile, leaving two men to guard the truck, the rest of us who had come over on this trip walked up past the small inn-buildings that made up the "village" of Shang-tu-k'ou, to see the chorten and the gate.

We found the chorten ruined. Chinese soldier-bandits had torn off the gold-plated finial atop its slender spire, and had smashed in the front of it to steal the small handful of offerings included with its holy relics. This was a foretaste of what we were to find all too often in Inner Mongolia, where border Chinese with guns have taken

advantage of the relative helplessness of the Mongol lamas to despoil their temples and shrines.

Beyond the gate, the desert stretched off into the distance. Soft gray and tan sand dunes undulated toward the southern horizon, but the hills stretching away toward the mountains to the north were more gravelly and covered with sagebrush. In either direction it was absolutely barren.

On each side of the chorten-gate, we noticed a rather crude cairn or *öbö*, on which generations of travelers had tossed small stones to thank the gods for helping them to cross the little pass in safety. Above the gate to the north, on the highest point of the ridge-crest, we could see an even older monument, the ruins of a centuries-old watchtower. It might have been built by the Huns and destroyed by Jenghis Khan, for this region was rich in the history of vast empires that had risen to defy China.

On our way back to the landing we passed a trio of colorful figures who stood talking in the doorway of an inn, and stopped to look at them. Two were Mongolian lamas in shabby robes of saffron and crimson, bound at the waist by twisted sashes of faded purple cloth. One lama had a crushed felt hat on his shaven head, the other was bare-headed, and both wore high, leather Mongol boots. The one with the hat was tall and rather gaunt, with a long nose, and sunken cheeks below high cheekbones. The other was shorter and more thickset, with a broader face. Both might have been taken for American Indians. As we came up, they were in the act of replacing their carved snuff-bottles in their belt-purses, having taken them out to exchange them with the third man, who had just joined them.

The newcomer was a layman, a much finer looking man, with a frank, pleasant expression in contrast to the somewhat furtive looks of the lamas. He too would have resembled an American Indian except for the long, drooping moustache under his small, finely chiseled nose. Unlike the lamas, he was wearing a dark blue summer robe of heavy serge, with a red sash, a brown felt hat, and cloth boots. The latter were more ornate than the lama's leather ones, and were beautifully worked with lucky symbols applied in patches of dark leather.

Though the features and dress of all three were so typically Mongol, and unlike anything we had seen in China, I thought I would try the experiment of greeting them in Chinese. The taller monk an-

swered, with quite a strong accent, explaining that he, like many other lamas of the border regions I had visited, often had occasion to deal with Chinese merchants in buying things for his temple, and had learned their language in that way.

He told me that all three of them belonged to the Ottok Banner, one of the seven divisions of the Ordos Tribe that lives in this desert. He and his fellow-lama had come down from the temple on the cliff, which he called Lo-shan Miao in Chinese. The layman, he said, had a tent in the desert to the southeast.

As we talked, I noticed a faded-looking Mongol woman sitting in the doorway of the next hut. The tall lama said that she was also of their Banner. She had on a dirty, dark green robe, scuffed boots that had once been as fancy as the layman's, and a soiled piece of toweling bound around her head over a very distinctive-looking headdress.

From under the cloth her hair hung in many small braids, all joining together to form two large ones that framed her face. Each of the large braids was encased in a tapering cylinder of dark leather, ending in flat, diamond-shaped corals set in silver. At the top of each cylinder was a large leather knob covered by a silver plate, rounded at the front and square in back, where it rested against her shoulder. These plates were also coral-studded. The contrast of the bright jewels with her otherwise very bedraggled appearance gave a strange impression of wealth in squalor, an impression that we were to feel again and again during our stay in Inner Mongolia.

When I asked the tall lama about her headdress, he seemed surprised at my question, but explained that it was the basic type worn by all married women in the Ottok Banner. When we came to know people of some of the other Ordos Banners, though, we found that their women also wore the two braids encased in leather. Apparently only the shape and decoration of the silver plates in the upper portion marked the distinctions between each Ordos Banner.

A number of Chinese, young and old, ferry workers and inn servants, had followed us up from the riverbank, showing the invariable rude curiosity about foreigners that we always found in the backcountry, but could never entirely get used to. When we stopped to look at the Mongols, a few of the youngsters laughed, and some of the adults walked off with expressions of disgust. One old man spat in contempt.

"Mongol dogs!" he exclaimed. His attitude of disdain, and that of those around him, seemed to express more than the usual bad feeling of uneducated Chinese toward other peoples in the remote frontier regions. The four Mongols, in turn, were pointedly ignoring the Chinese who stood behind us, making it plain that no love was lost on their side, either.

I supposed that their mutual ill-feeling was probably due to the intolerance of two very different peoples thrown together in a sparse frontier region. The struggle for livelihood between the inpushing Chinese immigrants and the native Mongolians would inevitably bring them into constant competition, while their very different ways of life, as settled farmers and nomadic herdsmen, would make for constant misunderstandings.

I admitted to myself, though, that this explanation was probably oversimplified. In any case, I decided on the way back to the river that I would take every opportunity, in the spare time permitted by my job, to study the life of the Mongols and notice its differences from Chinese ways. Perhaps by doing this, I could find out the various elements that made for the misunderstanding and mutual hatred. This added a personal objective to the military one, for my travels in Inner Mongolia.

2

CROSSING THE ORDOS

BY the time we got back to the river the other scow had arrived. The ferry coolies soon finished reloading the truck, and we hitched on the trailer with extra drums of gas and water for crossing the desert. Then we climbed aboard and got under way again. We could not pass through the chorten-gate; that had been built just high enough for a camel, still the principal means of transport in this region. Instead, we drove north on another trail that ran for a short distance along the base of the ridge, then cut east through a newly made cleft to enter the desert.

We were surprised to find how good the road was at first. It was only single track, but in this region of gravel hills, it had a firm base, and we scarcely sank at all. We passed a unit of the Suiyuan Provincial Army working on one section, and they all stood up to gape at the size of our truck. Finally we reached a well, where we stopped to camp for the night.

A "well" in the Ordos, or anywhere in Mongolia, for that matter, has none of the romantic associations of a desert oasis in literature. This was a typical one; merely a deep hole sunk in the sand. Around it were no palm trees, no trees at all. In fact, nothing whatever was growing for some distance around the stone trough beside the boulder-lined shaft. The hoofs of sheep and goats, brought there to drink, had completely uprooted the little grass that might have managed to spring up in such a place.

After setting up our cots for the night and unrolling our bedding, we ate a few cans of C-rations, then climbed a low rise behind the well, to see what the country beyond looked like. The view in all directions seemed bleak and unprepossessing. We were not yet used to the desert and could not appreciate the natural beauty of its different aspects.

Sagebrush-covered sand and gravel rising to low hills, occasionally crowned with jagged outcroppings of colored sandstone,

stretched on endlessly to the north, east, and south. To the west rose the mountains we had seen when looking northward from the ferry. Now they loomed dark against the setting sun. Only the deep shadows cast by the last rays of sunlight gave any character to the landscape. Otherwise it had a uniformly drab aspect that seemed repellent to us.

We sighted several large herds of black and white sheep and goats grazing on distant slopes, a sign that the country was fairly well settled; but one of the fellows spoke the thoughts of all of us when he exclaimed,

"Why should people want to live in this dreary place at all!"

As we returned to camp we were followed by a small herd of mangy, summer-thin camels, who appeared as if from nowhere. They seemed equally obsessed by curiosity about us, and a desire to drink from the well-trough. The camels were followed in turn by a herd of sheep driven by a scared-looking Mongol herdboy in a heavy sheepskin coat with the wool inside. When we stopped there, we had not seen any sign of life for miles. Now, with camels, sheep, and finally a herd of goats from the other direction, the place was crowded.

In time the animals drifted off and, as it was fast getting dark, we began to think about turning in. Now we could see the reason for the boy's sheepskin coat. As soon as the sun went down an icy breeze sprang up from the north. It pierced right through our light summer khakis. When we left subtropical Chungking in sweltering heat, we had not expected to find such extremes in climate, and had not brought enough bedding for sleeping out in such a place. We finally solved the problem by turning in fully dressed and pulling the blankets over our heads, thus shutting out the cold, and the beauty of the stars.

Next morning we were wakened at dawn by the loud braying of an indignant she-camel being led to the well by a Chinese homesteader who must have lived nearby. Her protests seemed uncalled for, as she was only carrying two empty wooden water-buckets hung from the usual camel's pack-saddle. The latter was made of two long, burr-filled bags of coarsely woven goat hair, pressed firmly against either side of the sagging humps by a pair of stout poles, the ends of which were lashed together by hair ropes where they projected beyond the humps, fore and aft. The driver was leading her by a

softer, more flexible rope of braided camel's hair, fastened to a long wooden peg that pierced her muzzle behind the nostrils.

The angry animal got more and more annoyed as she neared the well, and when the man tugged lightly at the lead-rope to get her to kneel beside the trough, she lost all patience. Curving her neck up and back, she looked skyward, and let out a trumpet blast that woke the last sleepers.

Our surprise and amusement at this desert alarm clock was quickly forgotten when Fred Johansen, the magician, rolled up his bedding. For lack of a cot, he had been sleeping on the ground. "What's this?" he asked, nudging with his toe at something under the edge of his lower blanket. It was a large scorpion that must have been attracted by the warmth of his body as he slept. After this, we were more careful where we walked and where we sat down.

After a breakfast of rations, we continued on across the desert. The scenery seemed even more monotonous. Rise succeeded rise, with the same bleak vistas of sand and sagebrush from each hilltop, and countless dried-up riverbeds cutting down the intervening valleys. Only the grazing herds of half-wild Mongol ponies, and the small flocks of wild antelopes that we scared up now and then, helped to liven the dreary landscape.

I kept looking for the Mongol tents, wondering why I did not see any. We frequently sighted horsemen and herdsmen in the distance, but saw no sign of their dwellings. Later, when I came to know the Ordos more intimately, I found out why this was. Actually the whole region is quite well populated, but the Mongols are not anxious to have their tents seen from the road, where they might tempt passing Chinese. We must have been driving past numerous encampments all the time, hidden beyond rises, or set on the slopes of river gullies, below the level of the plain.

Meanwhile, the "road" we were following became worse and worse. It had only recently been built as a supply route to Shanpa, the temporary capital of Suiyuan.

As far back as 1926, I was told in Ninghsia, a bus road had been built linking Paotou, the terminus of a railway running west from Peking, with Ninghsia City. This road led along the north and west side of the Yellow River loop, without any crossings. The bus service had begun with much ceremony, and the provincial officials publicly heralded it as a new era in the opening of Inner Mongolia.

But unfortunately, they spoke too soon. Within a few weeks all traffic had to be suspended because bandits were looting the busses. It was never reopened, and before long erosion and drifting sands had ruined it.

By 1937, when Governor Fu Tso-yi was driven west by the Japs, that road had long since been impassable. For several years thereafter all war supplies had to come from the south by caravan, and only a trickle got through. As soon as he could spare some troops, Fu had them make the road we were on.

We wondered why he had had it built across the Ordos. The drifting sands south of San-sheng-kung had caused trouble on the old road, but the obstacles on this route—even aside from the clumsy river crossings—made it all the more impractical. We suspected that in view of the bad relations between him and Governor Ma of Ninghsia, the rival warlord, Fu had deliberately made this road between their domains difficult of access.

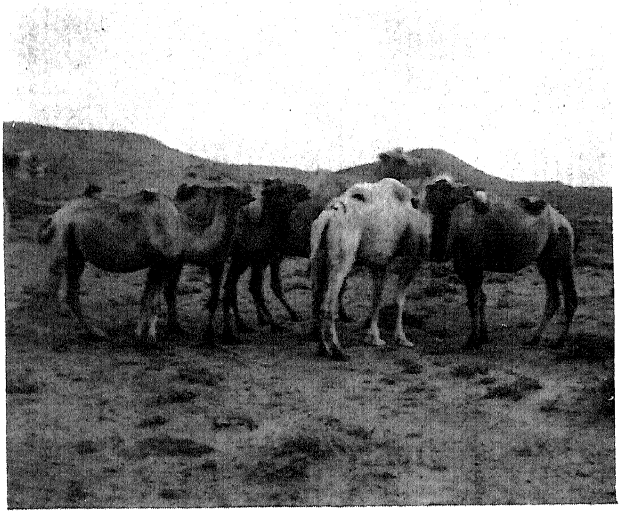
Be that as it may, the road got steadily worse as we went further north. Yesterday we had seen soldiers improving the southern stretch, but along here, little had ever been done except a certain amount of leveling and removal of boulders. For the most part it was only a single track, but in places it branched to make several parallel ones, for no apparent reason.

In most cases, the main track was marked by small cairns of pebbles piled to stand out above the snow or drifting sands, or by the bleached bones of horses and camels that had died on the winter caravans. Several times, where the way was not marked, we got off into soft places while trying to find it again, and only the powerful ten-wheel drive pulled us out.

Meanwhile, the air was unbelievably dry, and it grew hotter and hotter as the sun rose higher, even though it was only shining dimly through the clouds. Our throats were parched from the heat and dust, and we were constantly tantalized by mirages. I knew from the map that there were several large salt lakes in the Western Ordos, but I was sure that our road kept well to the west of them. Still we kept seeing what looked like broad tracts of water to the east and west, and even directly ahead. The latter always vanished as we approached, leaving the same gravelly sand.

The mirages to the west were especially spectacular because that high range, the Arbus Ula, jutted out of the desert on this side of the

Getting the truck aboard the Yellow River ferry.



Ordos camels in summer, with sagging humps.
(*Photos by W. E. Hill.*)

Chinese immigrant farmer ploughing up old Mongol grazing land on Hou-t'ao Plain.

Farmers harvesting soy beans on Hou-t'ao Plain.
(*Photos by W. E. Hill.*)

Yellow River, with a strange, flat-topped mountain towering high above the rest. At times the lower mountains would be hidden by heat waves, and then the lofty one looked like an island rising from a silvery sea.

To slake our thirst and stretch our legs, we broke our journey twice. We stopped first at a posthouse below a red sandstone mesa, standing alone on the rolling plain, and again at a small lama temple called Lo-pei Chao. I tried to get us admitted to the shrines, as I wanted the rest of the group to see what a Mongol temple was like, but the lamas refused. They made the excuse that the monk with the keys was away. We were disappointed, but this was a small loss as it turned out. Some of us were to see much larger and better lama-series before many weeks had passed. And the day was to come when several of us would be seeing all too much of Lo-pei Chao.

One of the lamas, a tall old man, invited me into his private quarters, a small room opening out on a private courtyard. Half of the room was raised to make a dais, or *k'ang*, under which was a stove for winter. This had several small rugs to sit on, and a roll of sheepskin for bedding was pushed back against the rear wall. A shrine-box stood on a chest in the corner, its painted door blackened from the smoke of the butter lamps set out before it, and a sacred picture hung on the wall above. Otherwise the room was plain.

The old lama brewed some tea in a large brass pot, making it with milk, a hunk of butter and a chip from a block of salt. He served it to me in a wooden bowl with much ceremony, and helped himself to some, but in spite of this show of friendship he still refused to open the temples. Either his Chinese was very limited, or he did not care to speak it, and I as yet knew no Mongolian, so conversationally the party was a failure.

We spent most of the afternoon waiting for the ferry to get our truck back across the Yellow River. This was our third, and last, dangerous crossing, and we knew more or less what to expect. But when the scow finally got across to us, the boatmen seemed unpardonably clumsy and inefficient. They were Mohammedan Mongols from a small community upriver, more used to handling oxcarts than trucks. Tempers were lost on both sides.

The only really patient individual there was a temporary boatman, a stocky, well-built, but rather surly-looking lama. First he calmly helped to lighten the weight of the truck. Then he peeled off his

Mongol boots and hiked up his scarlet robes around his waist to help shove off. Finally he stripped altogether, and joined the towmen wading against the current, until the ferry got far enough upstream to swing across.

It looked strange to see a monk working like this, as the lamas generally form a privileged class, and usually only destitute peasants are expected to pay their way across by helping—generally at the sweeps. I finally asked the head boatman about him, and learned that he was a lama wrestler from Lo-pei Chao, who wanted to get into trim for the annual temple games, soon to be held at Wojer Sume, a larger monastery nearby. His name, the boatman said, was Dansing.

When the old scow finally swung out into the current to cross the river, we grounded twice on sandbars. The second time a strong eddy slammed us hard aground, and the steersman warned us that we might have to sit and wait for the river to rise before we could get off. The prospect annoyed two of the Americans, who were already impatient with the boatmen. They stripped and jumped overboard, and by exerting pressure at the right places soon had us off the bar.

We were all glad when we finally made the other bank, and got the truck ashore. It was now only a short distance to the Belgian Mission at San-sheng-kung, and as far south as Sian, people had been telling us of the priests' famous hospitality.

3

THE GREAT PLAIN

WHEN WE crossed the river, leaving the Ordos Desert behind us, we were once more in Ninghsia. But this territory was vastly different from the lush farming land we had passed through in the southern part of the province. The broad stretches of coarse marsh grass and reeds, that extended for a mile or two back from the river, gave way to small farming plots reclaimed from the desert by irrigation trenches. Though here and there the desert had reconquered them with slowly moving, wind-blown dunes.

The mud houses of the farmers who tilled them were for the most part clustered in small villages inside heavy walls, for protection against bandits, though a few families that were too poor to have anything to lose had their huts out beside their fields. Most of the villages had grown up around the missions or outstations of the Belgian fathers, but some had been formed by clans or groups of friends who had migrated together from some district south of the Great Wall, banding together for mutual protection against border raiders.

We spent that night at San-sheng-kung, the headquarters of the Belgian Mission, a sizable town about two miles back from the river. Here the priests gave us some much needed water to wash off the dust of desert travel, and fed us a large European-style dinner with plenty of wine and homemade cheese. It amused us, and at the same time impressed us, to see the varying types around the supper table: Dutch peasant-types, intellectual-looking Flemings, and even an aristocratic old German. In Europe at this time they would have been on bad terms, if not open enemies. Here they were chatting together with plenty of good-natured banter, apparently the best of friends. After supper, small, jolly Father van Holst served us some homemade liqueur. Then he sat down beside me and told how their mission, the Congrégation de Scheut, of Brussels, had started its work in that region.

In the late 1870's, he said, when the terrible Mohammedan Rebellion had ended and it was safe for missionaries to travel, the first Belgian father arrived from the East to set up a small chapel in the neighboring town of Tung-t'ang. This was then all Mongol land. From the Ordos to the mountains that rim the plain on the West, and even beyond, it all belonged to the Prince of the Alashan Oelot Banner. A few families of Chinese pioneers had moved in during the past hundred years, but they had all been driven off or massacred by the fanatic Moslems in the 60's. The father and his colleagues, who came shortly after, agreed to lease a large tract from the prince in return for a nominal yearly tribute.

"We still keep the contract with his descendant, the present Prince of Alashan," Father van Holst added. "His messengers will come to collect the annual sum at the end of this month. They are always very tall for Mongols; so tall! And what beautiful horses! You would like to see them."

I assured him that I certainly would like to see them, but explained that this trip of ours was only a very brief one—just an interlude in our China duty. We expected to be returning South within a week or two.

He went on to tell me how the newcomers wanted to encourage settlers who would be converts, and how they immediately saw that the principal thing needed to turn this uncertain grazing land into a rich farming region was a controlled water supply. The rains were rare, and torrential when they came, but a canal would solve the problem. In fact, the ruins of ancient ditches some twenty centuries old showed that someone had had the idea before. What had been done once could be done again.

As soon as the first converts began to dig ditches and irrigate the land, small groups of Chinese farmers, poor refugees from famine-stricken Shansi and Shensi—the neighboring provinces to the south and east—had moved in. As word got back to their former homes, more immigrants came. These were of poorer stock, some of them fugitives from justice, but they all helped to reclaim the land. In the short space of about forty years the Chinese settlers had dispossessed most of the Mongols, sometimes by fair means but usually not. They had driven the original owners back into the barren mountain range that rimmed the horizon to the north and west, enclosing the Great Plain.

Father van Holst and his fellow missionaries deplored the effect of this on the Mongols. In fact, those who had worked with the Mongols at their Ordos station liked them far better than the immigrant Chinese. However, they felt that the change was bound to come eventually anyhow, with the recent Chinese tendency to thrust beyond the frontiers. There was no doubt in their minds that their work had been predominantly for the good; much land had been reclaimed, and many souls saved.

Later that evening we partially repaid the mission hospitality with a show by our magician. Before the War, Fred Johansen had been an amateur magician of considerable talent. He had been sent to China because of other more technical qualifications, but in Chungking his magic ability became known through a few public shows for Chinese and American friends. The officer originally in charge of the convoy had seen him perform there, and had brought him along as a sort of court jester, to create good will when we were feasted by Chinese officials. Our commander's foresight in providing himself with an entertainer and a doctor, as well as a private mechanic and an American interpreter, had provoked the chuckles of other officers, but we were extremely grateful to him. Not only were the four of us glad for the opportunity to make the trip, but with our respective specialties, the expedition was prepared for almost anything.

They were having a conference at the mission, and had only one or two vacant rooms, so most of us slept out in the parklike garden. The spreading shade trees and European flowers brought nostalgic memories of shaded lawns and gardens at home. It was hard for us to realize that just over the wall was a semidesert, where crops were only kept up at great cost. It was a most peaceful and relaxing spot for the fathers when they came in from their out-stations. But even San-sheng-kung, restful as it seemed, had had its share of border violence. That evening and on later occasions, the priests told us of harrowing experiences during bandit raids and local wars. They had even felt the effect of this War, when a Japanese bomb, aimed at a company of local militia in the village outside their wall, had badly damaged the beautiful mission church.

Next morning, we drove for an hour or more over the same flat country. Now and then we passed a farm or two, or a cluster of them around a mission chapel; but a lot of the land lay waste. The missionaries said that fear of bandits had discouraged some of the

settlers and driven them away, but many of the latter had been a shiftless lot and were discouraged by the sheer work of pioneer farming. The irrigation ponds had silted up, and marshes had sprung up around them. In several places large dunes had formed where bad farming methods had removed the topsoil and released the drifting sands. Apparently it did not take long to ruin this reclaimed land. A small lamasery here, and a crumbling chorten there, on an older trail parallel to the main road, showed that the district had only recently been taken from the Mongols.

Then we came to a small creek, with a guardhouse beside the bridge. A soldier signaled to us to stop, and a sullen-looking officer strolled out to examine our Chinese passports. This was the provincial border, and now we were back in Suiyuan.

The country on the other side of the creek was exactly the same. A completely flat plain reached almost to the horizon northwest of us, ending abruptly against the towering wall of the Khara Narin Ula, or Lang Shan Range. The mountains were a soft lavender color through the morning haze. They seemed very far away, but we could not judge their distance.

This Hou-t'ao Plain was vast. It looked as though it extended indefinitely to the south and to the northeast, but our map showed that it had limits. Apparently it stretched in a broad arc from a little below San-sheng-kung to the town of Sarachi (Sa-hsien), east of Paotou, extending from the present course of the Yellow River to its old bed at the base of the Lang Shan Range.

The priests had said that this whole area had been rich grazing land, divided up between several Mongol Banners. The Alashan Banner had owned only the western section. Until the latter part of the last century, Inner Mongolia—like Manchuria—was closed to the Chinese by orders of the Manchu Emperors of China. These orders had been relaxed, without being formally repealed, during the 1870's.

The first Chinese colonists had been merchants from Tatung, Kalgan, and Peking, who imported manufactured goods in exchange for furs and hides. Then came artisans and small traders, followed by farmers, who were often destitute and desperate men, sometimes even fugitive criminals. These had gradually moved into the eastern section of the plain, around Sarachi, and at the turn of the century they began to spread westward toward this region, until they met

the colonists from the south, brought in by the irrigation projects of the San-sheng-kung Mission.

This Chinese population was still rather scant and very scattered, especially in this western area, until 1914, when Inner Mongolia was incorporated into China proper. In that year, it was divided up into four administrative districts and opened officially to colonists, in order to form a buffer region to protect the northern provinces from Russian influences, which were already strong in Outer Mongolia. In 1928, after the Russians had taken over Outer Mongolia altogether and had begun to organize it in their own fashion, the four districts of Inner Mongolia were reorganized. They were made into definite provinces—Jehol, Chahar, Suiyuan, and Ninghsia—and colonists were given special encouragement. The railroad from Peking, which had been extended as far as Paotou in 1923, made traveling easier, and many families came. Now, the whole Hou-t'ao Plain was predominantly Chinese. Aside from an occasional small settlement where the Mongols had turned to farming for self-preservation, it was necessary to ride to the mountains which bordered the great plain on the northwest and the north to find Mongols in any number.

Unfortunately for the newcomers, however, this territory did not offer them opportunities for an independent life and personal enrichment, such as our own pioneers found in the American West. For in Inner Mongolia, the officials had staked out claims to all the rich areas for themselves, before opening the land to colonization. Thus a settler could not own his own land, but had to become a tenant of a semifeudal landlord, either a Chinese official or the Belgian Mission. Many preferred to take their chances with the foreigners, since the Belgians had shown their initiative in developing the land by irrigation systems, especially in the western portion of the Hou-t'ao.

Our rough map showed that Shanpa was near the center of the western farming region. Long before we reached it, we began to expect a town of some size, as the area seemed very rich. We passed broad fields of wheat, millet, and ripening melon plants, with glimpses of large castles of wealthy landlords set back in willow groves. The fathers at San-sheng-kung, however, had warned us not to expect too much. They told us that before the War, the new capital of Suiyuan had been only a small farming village, called T'ai-an-Chen, built around one of their mission stations. Its rise in rank, they said

had only brought a change in size, without any radical change in its nature.

This was almost true. As we drove down the unpaved main street of Shanpa, all the shops were very low, only one story high. Two or three brick buildings of modified foreign style, had high fronts with characters that proclaimed them as branches of national banks. One or two other, modern-looking structures, faced in grey brick with fancy trimmings in white, were apparently food shops run by refugees from the East. Otherwise the shops were very simply built, of whitewashed adobe, with open fronts. On the long black counters, we caught glimpses of wooden saddles from Sian and Lanchow to the south, handsome saddle rugs from Ninghsia and Paotou for those who could afford them, and a lot of harness and other leather goods, made from hides sold by the Mongols.

Glancing down the main cross street, we caught sight of some wooden hoops with colored cloth streamers that marked eating shops —red streamers for the pork-selling Chinese restaurants, and blue or black for the mutton and beef shops of the Moslems. On the outskirts of town we passed several large inns or caravanserais. These had large open courtyards surrounded on two or three sides by sheds for the pack bales, with hitching posts to tether horses or camels, and in a rear courtyard small shacks for the men to sleep. The inns, like the private dwellings on the side streets, were of plain adobe mud. Only the doors, door frames, and window lattices were made of the ultra-scarce wood.

Shanpa did not strike us as being a very colorful town, but as we only had time for a quick glance, we reserved judgment. We drove on beyond it for about five miles, past isolated farms, and finally reached the American camp, our destination.

4

CAMP LIFE AND RECREATION

A SHORT distance beyond the last adobe shack, the newly made road led to the gate of a large fortress-like structure, with a few small barracks off to the left. The plain mud walls had several circular insets of white plaster painted with foot-high characters to make a trite Nationalist slogan. It looked like any modern Chinese garrison.

Two Chinese soldiers with American automatic rifles stood by the mud sentry boxes that flanked the gate. When they saw we were Americans they waved us through into a narrow lane. Most of the permanent staff came crowding out to meet us, through doors opening out of courtyards at each side. About eight officers and a dozen enlisted men were regularly assigned to the post, and since it was Sunday, only two were on duty. They took us right into the chow-hall for lunch; asking us a thousand questions about their buddies down in China, and what things were like at headquarters in Chungking since they had left there.

When we had finished answering their questions, we asked some of our own, about the camp itself and the surrounding country. We were surprised to find that it was a Belgian mission station, fortified by a reinforced mud wall. Some of the original buildings had been taken over for a weather station, and the rest had been turned into barracks for the weather boys and for the Americans sent up to instruct Chinese guerillas for border warfare. The barracks we had seen outside the walls were for the latters' students.

It seemed that when the first party of Americans had arrived in the winter of 1944, and asked the Governor to find them a place to stay, he had given them this mission station, formally called Tashun-chen. At first they did not realize that it was a question of confiscation, though they had wondered at the sullenness and apparent resentment of the outgoing priests. As soon as the first camp commander, who was incidentally a Protestant, discovered the facts

of the case, he arranged to pay the Belgian Mission for its use, as though he were merely renting it from them. This had established cordial relations between the Americans and the missionaries, to their mutual advantage.

After lunch that day, they found temporary bunks for the doctor and me in the officers' quarters, while the rest of the party were temporarily housed in the small chapel, now deconsecrated. All but three of the group, including myself, expected to be returning south in a week or two. I had just finished stowing my gear when one of the camp's officers walked in and suggested "a swim in the Gobi," explaining that this meant a ride out to a desert swimming hole.

He led the doctor and me out to the corral and helped us find horses. Governor Fu had kindly lent to the camp enough Mongol ponies so that each of the permanent staff had one, with a few left over, along with three Chinese "horse boys" (*ma-fu*) to take care of them. The head ma-fu caught and saddled two of the extra ones for us, and we rode off with a group of men from the camp.

It was wonderful to get exercise again, and we came to like the country even better from this closer, more intimate view of it. As we headed west toward the tall mountains, the peaks seen through the hot afternoon haze were a soft reddish purple. The path itself was rather narrow, with an irrigation ditch on our left, and a tall stand of reeds to our right. One of the leading horses flushed a pheasant out of a thicket and it scurried across the path.

Soon the irrigation ditch turned off toward the south, and the land began to get drier. Patches of sand among the grass and reeds soon gave way to a stretch of real desert. Tall dunes rose on all sides, gleaming white in the sunlight and casting deep blue shadows. We scrambled up one to see the view, amid clouds of sand dislodged by the slipping hoofs, and I was surprised to see that this desert tract was only about a mile long and half a mile wide, with more meadowland beyond. So this was what the boys at camp called the Gobi! I wondered whether the real Gobi, lying beyond those mountains to the west, looked like this on a larger scale. I supposed I would never know, as they had told us at lunch that the Japanese still had outposts just over the passes.

Beyond the third line of dunes we came to the pool. It was a natural pond several hundred yards long, and lay in a stretch of flatter prairie where grasses grew again. As we rode up in a dust cloud,

two Mongol herdboys who had been tending some fat cattle at the far end, moved nearer in curiosity. When we plunged in, the water which came from deep springs was ice cold with a faint taste of salt and alkali. It felt wonderful after months of no swimming in China. All the dust of travel washed off rapidly, and with it I lost the sense of responsibility for truck and men that had been weighing on me since we had left Sian.

For the next week and a half, I was fairly busy seeing Chinese officials, including Governor Fu himself, and my only recreation was an occasional after-supper canter out to the swimming pond. However, the trips themselves into Shanpa made a pleasant change from camp life. I gradually came to know the town quite well. Our first impressions of its provinciality had not been far wrong, though there were signs of attempted improvement. I noticed that further down the main street a row of shops had new fronts, and that workmen were beginning to dismantle other shops to remodel them in more elaborate fashion. When I asked a Chinese friend whether this was being done by the merchants themselves, he replied, "Of course not. Governor Fu is doing it. It makes his headquarters town look better, and thus gives him more 'face.' The money came from your country, through the United China Relief." I was taken aback as, before we entered the war, I had given this "charity" some money I had made from lecturing on China, and this example of the way its funds were used was very disillusioning.

The actual official buildings were very plain, looking much like the adobe houses and barracks that surrounded them. Probably they were intentionally left that way, to be inconspicuous in cases of possible bombing. The only exception was the Provincial Guest House. But that had to be imposing for reasons of "face," since high Government officers were housed there on official visits; even General Wedemeyer had stayed there. It was a very large building in foreign style, set in an elaborate formal garden, and would have made an excellent bombing target. And yet, although the Japanese airbase at Paotou was less than an hour away by plane, Shanpa had not been attacked since it had been built up as a capital after the repulse of the great Japanese cavalry raid into southwestern Suiyuan in 1940. In fact, it was rumored locally that the higher Chinese officials had "made arrangements" with the enemy that neither side would be too aggressive, in the interests of wartime trade.

We were all too ready to believe such rumors of corruption, having just come from Sian, where the city's shops were full of Japanese luxury goods, particularly textiles, indicating a large-scale collaboration in trade. None of us had any sympathy with the Communists, but from what we had already seen of the ruling clique throughout China, the overnumerous generals, and the war profiteers, we felt that there was ample room for a general governmental and social overhauling.

In spite of the widespread suspicion of General Fu's relations with our enemy, and his more easily substantiated reputation for hating and exploiting the Mongols, on first impressions I liked him as a person. He had lost a great deal of his former, excessive weight, so apparent in his earlier photographs, but had retained the good nature that people associate with fat men, and he was a most cordial host. He seemed to lack completely the patronizing conceit, the greedy love of display, and the authoritarian airs that characterized Governor Ma of Ninghsia and other warlords I had met. Perhaps this was due to the fact that he had so long held a subordinate position, ruling Suiyuan as a lieutenant of Yen Hsi-shan, the notorious warlord-dictator of Shansi, rather than on his own. During the war he had full power, however, and even though he had recently been officially relieved of the governorship, he still ruled in all but name, as the chief military leader in Suiyuan.

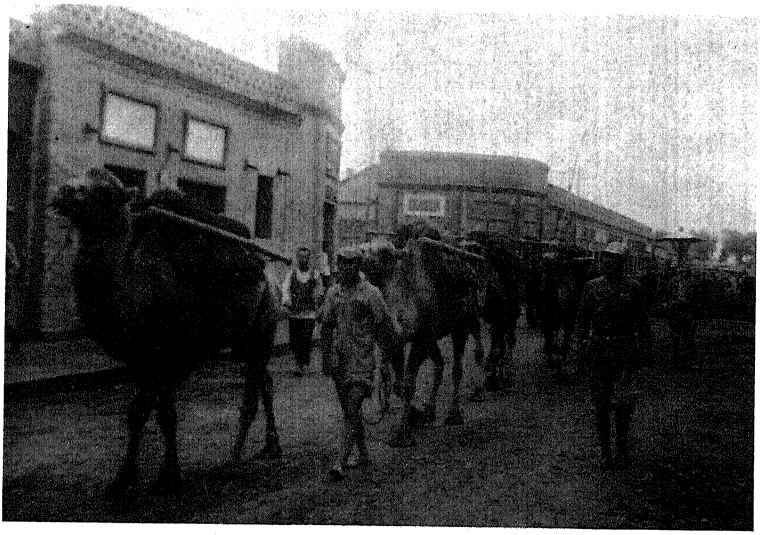
These interviews did not take very long, and I usually had some time to stroll around town before returning to camp. There was not a great deal to see. The Mission, still partly occupied by Fu's troops, a small, unimpressive mosque, and a few silver shops where the artisans hammered out some very intricate jewelry, were the only "sights" of the town. I was pretty discouraged about Shanpa until I discovered the market.

This was an important feature of the town that we had not seen when we passed through by truck, because it was located down a side street. The town officials had taken a large, open yard, with the backwalls of houses on two sides, and had walled in the other two, leaving a gate in each. Down the center they had built three rows of mud counters, about waist-high, extending the length of the yard. On these the dealers spread their wares.

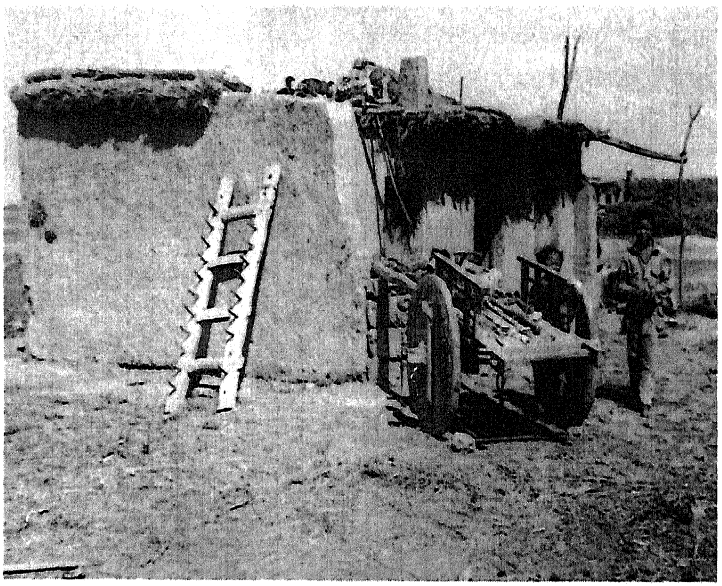
One section had metal goods of every description; anything from cheap knives and locks to ploughshares. Another had smuggled

The camp well.

A Chinese mother rides into Shanpa to market.



A Provincial army caravan enters Shanpa.
(*Photos by W. E. Hill.*)



Typical Chinese tenant farmers' homes on Hou-t'ao Plain.
(*Photos by W. E. Hill.*)

Japanese textiles: coarse cotton prints, plain silk fabrics in bright colors, and even rich satins for those who could afford them. Other sections seemed less specialized, displaying assorted trinkets and knickknacks to appeal to the farmers who came in to trade. We noted fancy buttons, spools of thread (Japanese), foreign soap, and primary school readers with a pronounced Nationalist bias.

On repeated visits, we noticed that one counter was usually bare. A dealer told me that this was not from lack of merchants. Many were simply unwilling to pay the rather high taxes for the privilege of selling in the market. In fact, a considerable number of people just spread their wares on the ground outside, along the sides of the adjoining alleys. In wet weather, when the alleys became creeks, they raised their things on planks. Here, outside the market proper, the farmers sold their meats and vegetables. On very hot days we would buy melons from them to quench our thirst. But what interested us more were the junk dealers, who spread their secondhand goods here, in a sort of flea market. We rarely visited town without a glance in at the junk section. One of us usually managed to pick up something fairly interesting—a handsome, hand-woven saddle rug, a brocaded Mongol vest, a Buddha looted from a lama temple, or a Mongol knife or snuff bottle.

When we were in town near mealtime, we generally stayed in, as the camp cook had no imagination, and his meals were pretty terrible. Sometimes four or five of us would ride in for supper, just for a change of diet. A late afternoon canter always improved the appetite. Occasionally we dropped in on three Army boys who had recently come to Shanpa for AGAS. Their cook was as good as ours was bad, and they were fine hosts. More often we went to some Chinese inn.

We would tether our horses in the public stable yard, and after a short prowl through the market place, come back to eat at one of the restaurants on the main cross street of town. They never had a menu. The boy would bring me an ink slab with a brush and a slip of rice paper, and would then stand behind me, whisking away the flies with a cow's-tail switch while I wrote down the order in Chinese.

The specialties of the house were fried chicken livers with pungent "flower pepper" to dip them in, and a "sweet dish" of tart peaches or crisp-textured pears, in casings of melted sugar that

hardened to a consistency of brittle glass when we plunged the sections into bowls of cold water. We usually chose both of these, along with three or four other dishes to round out a meal.

The liquor situation was not a happy one. Shanpa's alcoholic beverages could not match her food in either quality or variety. With our meals we generally could get nothing but some rather sickly sweet "yellow wine," *huang chiu,* even more cloying because it was warmed before serving, and a clear "white wine," *pai chiu,* that was distilled from a kind of sorghum called *kao-liang.* The latter was sometimes warmed too, but it did not need it. It already had its own inner fire and the wallop of liquid dynamite. The effect of even a small quantity of *pai chiu* was rapid, and not unpleasant in itself, but it all but paralyzed the taste buds and prevented full appreciation of the food. When we came with Chinese friends, such as Bob Kim, an English-speaking official in the Border Customs, we noticed that they urged us to drink a lot but seldom took very much themselves, preferring to enjoy the good eating. Rarely, this "rot gut" was replaced by a jug of "rose-petal dew," *mei-kuei lu,* imported from Ninghsia, where its making was a state monopoly. This luxury drink was a clear, amber-colored liquid, with a deceptively soft, sweetish taste, almost as cloying as *huang chiu,* but its ultimate effect was not far from that of the *pai chiu,* and it gave a worse hangover.

As we rode back through the town in the moonlight, I could never shake off the illusion that we were back in a frontier village of our own West in the 1870's. The one-story adobe shops were closed for the night, but beams of candlelight rayed out from chinks in the shutters. An occasional shop was taller because it had a false front. For some reason, these seemed to loom higher at night.

Small knots of people talked in darkened doorways or sat on the thresholds gossiping, their voices lost in the hoofbeats of our horses. Now and then a light would flare up as a man puffed on his water pipe, the sudden glow highlighting bronzed faces with prominent cheekbones that might have been those of American Indians. When the moon was full, its light shone soft on the dust of the streets and on the roughened surfaces of the adobe walls, but gleamed brightly on our bits and stirrups.

Aside from the barking of an occasional dog as we approached, everything would be rather still, until some urchin screamed *"hao*

pu-hao"? the national greeting of Chinese children to all GIs. Sometimes the silence would be so deep that we would feel strongly tempted to shatter it. Once or twice a fellow whipped out his revolver and did.

The ride back along the country road was always something of a thrill because of the element of the unexpected. If strong alcohol and too-rich food dulled the riders' perceptions and sense of timing, the moonlight played tricks on the eyes of horses who were prone to shy even in daylight. Our animals always balked at the three bridges over the irrigation ditches. They fidgeted at the sight of the dark water that flowed away with flashing glints of silver. And near the place where the old melon-seller sat by day—somehow he always threw them into a panic—was a tall signpost that had almost as bad an effect on them at night.

If the horses were skittish to start with, they would be finished by the old dog that lived about a mile down the road from camp. He would skulk in the shadows until we were just passing. Then he would lunge out into the road with a deep-throated roar. We usually rode the last stretch at a breakneck gallop, whether we wanted to or not.

The Chinese guards at the compound gate seldom bothered to challenge us as we returned, though we usually announced ourselves by force of habit. They knew us from afar because only Americans would ride like that.

5

FARMERS OF THE GREAT PLAIN

ON SUNDAYS, when the weather was good, at least one party usually left camp on a long riding trip. These rides across country gave a fine opportunity to see the life of the Chinese immigrant farmers, though of course we usually went with some other objective.

The Catholic members of the camp—including the C.O. and about half the personnel—always went to Mass first, and when I was in camp on Sunday I usually went with them. That, too, was secondarily a social study, for when the mission station of Ta-shun-chen was confiscated by General Fu for the use of the Americans, the religious activities of the district had been shifted to the nearby "castle." This was the home of a wealthy landlord who had been converted many years ago, and was typical of the strongholds of the landlord class.

It was actually a large farm, with the farmhouse and all its outbuildings enclosed by a strong mud wall. The wall was crenellated and pierced with loopholes for rifles. A high watchtower inside provided a vantage point for sighting bandits, and the main gate lacked only a drawbridge to look medieval European. Two towers flanked it, also with loopholes, and the doors were of heavy wood reinforced with iron.

As we entered, the living quarters were at the rear, the sheds for the servants and the animals were at the left, and the chapel was at the right. Actually, the chapel had been built as a storage building, and through the loose floor boards we could see countless bags of grain. This seemed quite symbolic, since the Church in that region was entirely supported by the grain tribute from its tenants. The floor boards were rough, so most of the congregation—made up largely of the landlord's family and tenants, with a few Chinese soldiers from camp—knelt on empty grain sacks. But Father Fan always gave us his handsome saddle rugs to kneel on.

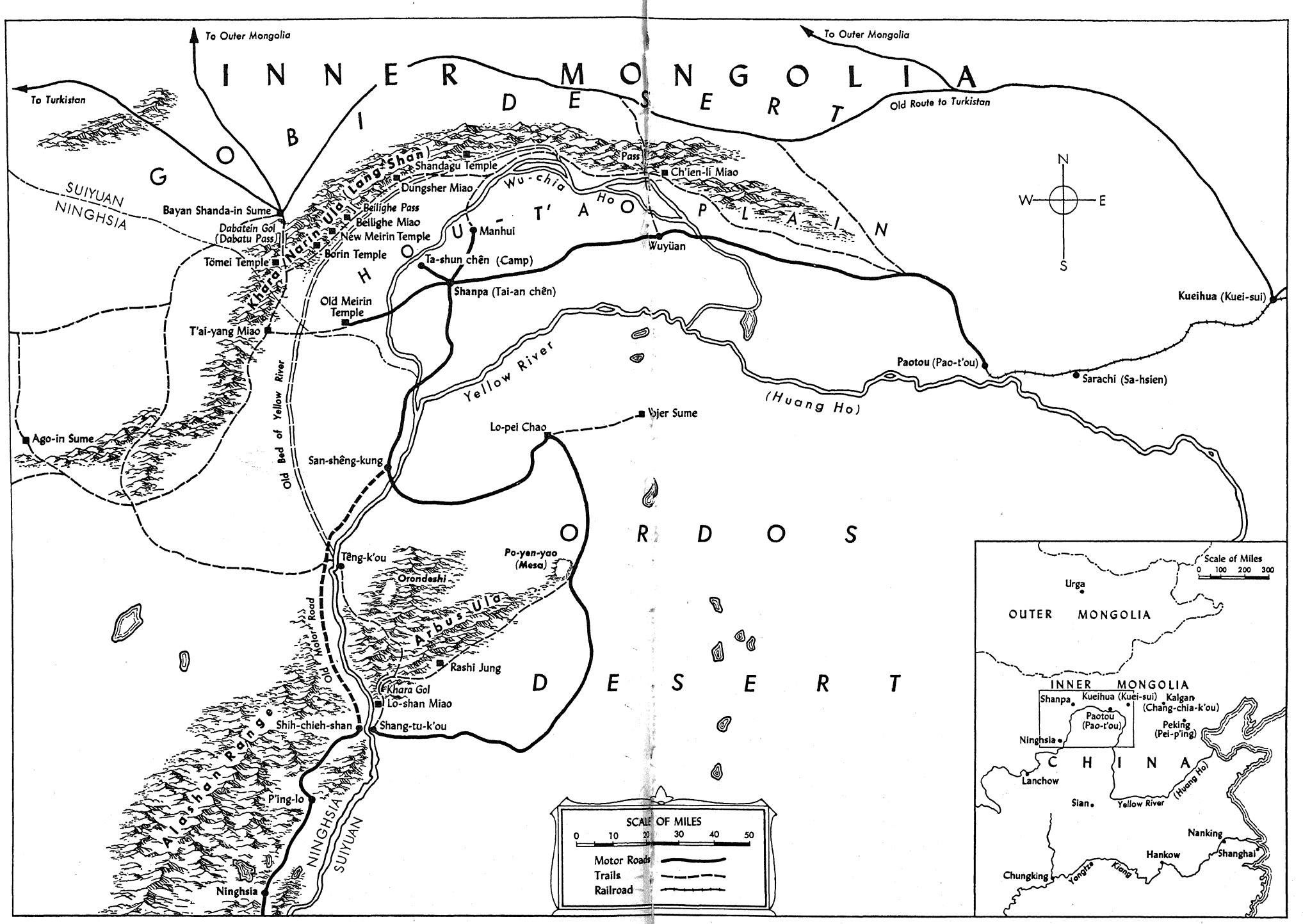
When he began the service with the traditional words, *"Introibo ad altare Dei,"* recited in clear Latin, I could not help thinking that it was the strangest altar to our God that I had ever seen. The altar itself was a long lacquered table with projecting ends, such as the Chinese in more civilized regions place in the shrines to their ancestors. At the back of this was a small box for the Sacrament which, in turn, supported a small brass crucifix imported from Belgium. The table for the cruets and candlesticks against the side wall was a brass-studded chest, lacquered red, with mythological Chinese monsters romping across its doors. The altar boy had a lama temple bell that he rang for the Sanctus and the Consecration.

Almost immediately the Chinese congregation began a dismal, droning chant, led by an old woman with a cracked voice. They kept this up with only an occasional pause throughout the service. From what little I could understand, it seemed to consist of interminable prayers that did not have any bearing on the actual ceremony. No doubt it helped to keep up the interest of the Chinese, since most of them had no idea what was going on at the altar, but to us it was disagreeably distracting. Only the calm sincerity of Father Fan gave the service its proper dignity.

After Mass, on our second Sunday at camp, the week after we arrived, the C.O. suggested a visit to Father Schram, who lived some three hours' ride to the north of us. There was no direct road to Manhui, the small town where he had his mission station, so we took Lao Tsai, the head ma-fu, to help us find the way.

Old Tsai was not a local man, but he knew this border country well and could always be depended on to get us where we wanted to go. He was an old border cavalryman, and had served under the great Northern warlord Wu P'ei-fu, beside whom General Fu and his old boss, Yen Hsi-shan, were smalltimers. When Wu "got religion," Tsai accompanied him to his retreat in a Buddhist monastery. But life there was too quiet for an old cavalryman. His narrow, weather-beaten face cracked into a wry grin when he told me about it. After a year of temple life, he left to join General Fu's army in Suiyuan. Now that he was getting old, he could no longer be as active, and he had been lent to the camp, along with the horses, to see that they were well cared for.

It was wonderful to see him with the horses; he was so understanding. It was a great blow to us all—and to the animals, too,



To Outer Mongolia
To Outer Mongolia
To Turkistan
INNER MONGOLIA
GOBI DESERT
Old Route to Turkistan
SUIYUAN
NINGHSIA
Bayan Shanda-in Sume
Dabatein Gol (Dabatu Pass)
Tömei Temple
Khara (Narin Ula (Lang Shan)
Shandagu Temple
Dungsher Miao
Beilighe Pass
Beilighe Miao
New Meirin Temple
Borin Temple
Old Meirin Temple
T'ai-yang Miao
Wu-chia Ho
Pass
Ch'ien-li Miao
HOU-T'AO PLAIN
Manhui
Ta-shun chên (Camp)
Shanpa (Tai-an chên)
Wuyüan
Kueihua (Kuei-sui)
Paotou (Pao-t'ou)
Sarachi (Sa-hsien)
Yellow River
(Huang Ho)
Old Bed of Yellow River
Ago-in Sume
San-shêng-kung
Lo-pei Chao
Vojer Sume
ORDOS DESERT
Têng-k'ou
Orondeshi
Po-yen-yao (Mesa)
Arbus Ula
Old Motor Road
Rashi Jung
Khara Gol
Lo-shan Miao
Shang-tu-k'ou
Shih-chieh-shan
Alashan Range
P'ing-lo
NINGHSIA
SUIYUAN
Ninghsia
N
W
E
S
SCALE OF MILES
0 10 20 30 40 50
Motor Roads
Trails
Railroad
Scale of Miles
0 100 200 300
Urga
OUTER MONGOLIA
INNER MONGOLIA
Shanpa
Kueihua (Kuei-sui)
Kalgan (Chang-chia-k'ou)
Paotou (Pao-t'ou)
Peking (Pei-p'ing)
Ninghsia
CHINA
Lanchow
Sian
Yellow River
(Huang Ho)
Nanking
Hankow
Shanghai
Chungking
Yangtze Kiang

no doubt—when, later in the summer, General Fu recalled him to Paotou. From then on, the horses deteriorated under bad care. The man appointed to replace Lao Tsai would try vainly to catch one by pursuing him around the corral for ten or fifteen minutes, uttering catcalls and brandishing a wooden shovel, until the animal was overheated and frightened. How different this was from Lao Tsai, who would approach a nervous horse with a low-voiced "d-r-r-r-t" and, running his fingers lightly across its withers and up the neck, would have him bridled in an instant. Lao Tsai was an exception, and his successor, a local man, was all too common a type.

Lao Tsai led us north as directly as he could, through the broad area of farmland between the camp and Manhui. We rode along irrigation ditches, on paths between the fields, or sometimes just through the fields, when no paths offered. The larger fields had crops of millet or soybeans, the smaller ones, cabbages or greens, and melon plots were quite common.

The heavy green heads of the millet were always a great temptation to our underfed horses. But we restrained them as much as possible, for the grain when ripened makes a valuable crop, highly prized by the Chinese and Mongols alike. The horses also enjoyed the bean plants with their small green pods, which in a few weeks would produce the beans for the soy sauce and bean curd, so familiar to us from Chinese cooking. We riders preferred the melons, especially the short, stubby watermelons with their juicy red or yellow interiors. The muskmelons here were very small, and rather flat tasting.

When our mouths were parched from the dust raised by our horses' hoofs, we would seek out a melon patch. Then, when the watchman came out of his shelter, the size and shape of a pup tent, made of sticks and straw, we would point out likely melons with our riding switches. If his tapping proved them ripe, he would slash them in two with one sweep of his broad knife, and pass them up to us. This ordering of melons from horseback seemed very feudal except that, unlike manor lords, we always paid for what we ate.

It was a dark day, and the wind was rather raw as it blew across the open fields, so some of the farmers had put on their spring and fall suits of home-knitted white wool. These were very long, almost skin-tight, and reminded us of old-fashioned winter underwear. One or two of the very old men, more susceptible to cold, even had on

their winter pants of sheepskin, with the wool inside, and the whitened leather out. A few of the hardier ones had kept on their regular summer ones of white cloth. As a matter of fact, all these garments, although they had started by being white, were now various shades of gray. In contrast to the sun-blackened torsos of their wearers, however, they still looked quite light.

The farmers' wives and mothers, sitting on the doorsteps of the small adobe shacks, all had dark trousers. The grandmothers had tight dark jackets, while the young unmarried girls wore brighter jackets of some light color, or even red, and fuller pants. The nursing mothers, which means all women with young children, did not wear jackets. Instead, they had a remarkable upper garment that amused us very much, though it was no doubt quite practical. This was a very narrow bib which extended from the neck to the trousers, between the breasts, leaving the latter exposed. They nursed the children until they were two or three; and sometimes the older children, youngsters of six or seven, would also step up for a drink.

Many of the older women waddled around on bound feet, and even some of the younger girls had had their feet bound by conservative-minded mothers "to make them more desirable brides." Luckily even here this detestable custom is dying out. I had noticed on my previous trips that such traits are kept longer in frontier regions; not necessarily because the Chinese there are more conservative, but because they like to cling to customs that set them apart from the alien group. Mongol women do not bind their feet.

The adolescent sons of the farmers wore smaller editions of their fathers' white cloth pants, and adolescent daughters dressed like their older, unmarried sisters in light-colored jackets and dark pants. The younger children—both boys and girls—did not wear anything at all. Apparently they were impervious to the cold wind.

The children of the farmers were generally very likable. They seemed quick and active and full of fun, and had not taken on the shiftlessness and cruelty of their fathers or the stolid stupidity of their mothers. Unfortunately, though, they could not look forward to an education that would give them better understanding and more inner resources to cope with their hard life. The schools were only for the children of the landlords and village elders. It would not be long before they would have to take on their full share in the family

toil, and the never-ending struggle to make ends meet in this bare-subsistence farming would soon reduce most of them to cynical callousness or fatalistic resignation.

The younger children no doubt heard fantastic stories about us from their elders, and believed them. It annoyed us very much to see mothers—even in Shanpa—trying to frighten young children into doing something by pointing at us and saying, "the foreigners will get you if you don't!" Probably it was because of threats like this that sometimes, when we rode past youngsters alone in the fields, they would either run screaming in the opposite direction, or else stand blubbering, rooted in fright. No attempted words of kindness would quiet such children; they were too scared to listen.

About halfway to Manhui, we came to the first of two large villages built around mission chapels, and from here our way was easier. We were able to take advantage of the "road" that connected the two villages and led on to the main highway from Shanpa to Manhui. Like the roads that connected the castles near camp with the Shanpa highway, they were mere tracks made by the solid-wheeled oxcarts in which most of the produce was carried to market. We hated to meet these carts in the narrow lanes, especially the ones that were piled high with hay or beanstalks, as their bulk looming up ahead was the last thing needed to make a skittish horse want to bolt.

The two large villages we passed through, like all the others on the plain, had until recently had heavy walls raised to keep out bandits. However, when General Fu had moved to Shanpa he discovered that some of these walled towns had themselves become bandit strongholds. Accordingly, he ordered that all except a few that he kept for barracks towns should demolish their walls.

The houses in the villages were for the most part like the homes of the farmers in the open country, mere mud huts of two small rooms with a flat roof. In fact, most of them were owned by farmers who had moved into the denser settlement for protection.

The clumsy wooden door had, at one side, projections at the top and bottom which fitted into sockets—there were no hinges. This opened into the first room, which was a combination storehouse, tool shed, and kitchen. The stove at the side was made of pounded mud like the walls, with a hole at the top big enough to hold the single utensil, a flaring pot called a *ko*. Everything to eat and drink was

prepared in this. Few families could even afford a kettle to boil water. Against the back wall was a wooden chest or two, holding the winter clothing and a sack of millet. This was their staple diet, since even the farmers who raised wheat or soybeans could not afford to eat any. All such crops went to the landlord. The tools seldom consisted of more than primitive rakes, wooden mattocks, and flails.

The second room, beside the first, was reached through a door in the partition that divided the house in half. It was mostly occupied by the k'ang, a raised mud platform that served as the bed for the entire family. An outlet from the stove ran through it to keep it warm in winter. This dais was usually covered with dirty felt pads, and the bedding consisted of ragged quilts or filthy sheepskins, swarming with fleas and lice.

The roofs were flat and simply made. The builders merely laid the trunks of small willow trees, three or four inches in diameter, across the tops of the walls, and piled on these a mattress of twigs and brush until it was strong enough to support the weight of a thick layer of mud. These surfaces sloped slightly for drainage, but were still flat enough so that the owners could spread grain or peppers on them to dry.

The shops in these towns were built much like the houses. However, instead of standing alone in a little yard, they were ranked side by side, with the two rooms of each arranged one behind the other.

Our chief impressions of the dwellings in the towns, as well as those of the tenant farmers along the way to Manhui, were their distinctive flying buttresses, and decoration of cowdung patties. The buttresses of irregular lengths and different angles, helped to prop up the walls of the one-story adobe houses and the low compound walls around them, while the patties were plastered in rows against the same walls to dry for fuel.

Even in the towns most families kept a few chickens and a pig or two in their yards. They were useful as scavengers and could provide meat on feast days. For all but the Mohammedans, pork is the principal meat eaten (the Moslems eat mutton, and beef when they can get it), and a dish of chicken and hot peppers was the accepted thing to serve sudden guests. These pigs were a particularly ugly variety, completely devoid of personality. Predominantly black, they had flopping ears and straight, dangling tails. Most of the weight was concentrated in the stomach, which swept the ground,

while their hams were pitifully thin. The chickens were poor and scrawny, forever being chased by the huge farm dogs. But they were aggressive too, and sometimes got their revenge in pecking the old dogs or harmless puppies.

On the edge of the villages and in the country most farmers kept a little stock, though the Chinese were seldom exclusively herdsmen; just as we later found that the Mongols who have turned farmer usually kept herds on the side. The Chinese farmers generally had one or two heavy oxen to draw carts and plows, and ultimately to be sold for beef, which they themselves could not afford to eat. The cows used for such heavy work seldom gave milk for more than their calves who trotted along beside them, but the Chinese do not drink cows' milk anyway. All of these cattle were rather shaggy, even in summer, while deep rings on their sweeping horns told of underfeeding in most winters, and near-starvation in some.

Most of the farmers had a couple of donkeys or small mules for pack animals. Sometimes we saw one of these donkeys yoked up with an ox to pull a plow. The donkey provided speed and nervous energy to make up for his lack of strength, but generally looked very offended at being used this way. When the donkeys and mules were not in use, they were herded by the farm children, who sometimes raced along beside us as we passed their fields. It always amused us to see how they rode them. They sat well aft, over the hind-quarters of the little animals, tapping their necks with long switches, and shouting back and forth to each other.

Many of the more portable commodities such as melons were carried to market on the backs of these little animals, usually in saddlebags of dark brown burlap with vertical white stripes. In the back alleys of Shanpa we used to see the fabric for these being woven in thirty-yard lengths, from a coarse weavable cord which had been spun from goat hair.

Most of the goat hair came from the herds of the Mongols, as the Chinese more commonly kept sheep. These were all of the fat-tailed variety, which store their surplus food in their broad tails. At this season they looked rather scrawny in body, even allowing for the recent summer shearing, and the wool that was now beginning to grow out again looked rather poor and coarse. In spite of their appearance, the farmers assured me that these sheep were very valuable because their food-storage system makes them capable of living

through hard winters that would kill other varieties. The rams had a certain grandeur with their heavy, spiralling horns, carried rather proudly to balance the weight. But the ewes, with their prominent Roman noses, recalling overbred dowagers, were distinctly ugly.

Spinning wool was the great preoccupation of the farmers when they were not working in the fields or squatting on their doorsteps to smoke their pipes and gossip. We would often see young and old strolling back from the fields, or on their way over for a chat with the neighbors, automatically spinning a length of coarse yarn. They had a stick piercing a round stone weight, and would set this twirling to twist the wool into cord, winding the finished product around the stick.

Many of the men could knit, for knitting is considered a man's job in most parts of Asia. The farmers generally worked at the somewhat shapeless sweaters and long trousers that made up their winter garb, and commonly worked with sheep's wool. Our soldiers at camp were more ambitious. One of our hard-boiled sentries knitted on a camel's hair sweater when he was not on duty, and several others were doing socks of the same material. They were very clever at knitting fancy patterns and sections in cable stitch, etc., but the finished product seldom looked well, due to their carelessness in selecting the wool. Camels come in a variety of colors, from creamy white to dark brown. Some have more than one color, a common type being light tan with dark brown fur on their manes, shoulders, and ankles. So, unless the wool had come from one camel of fairly uniform coloring—which it seldom did—the sweater or pair of socks would be oddly striped and streaked.

We did not see many of the camels themselves on this trip. Lao Tsai explained that although many of the farmers and some of the wealthier villagers owned them for winter transport, they generally sent them out in herds to the base of the mountains for summer grazing, collecting them again in the fall. Just before we came out on the main road from Shanpa to Manhui, we saw one small herd set out to graze in a patch of wasteland. They were horrible to see, looking even worse than the mangy ones that had come down to the well that evening in the Ordos.

Almost totally humpless, their razor-sharp backs sloped upward to high withers and down again to snakelike necks, on which swung heavy, reptilian heads. If they had any humps at all, these sagged

flabbily, sometimes both on one side, more often, one on each. Clouds of flies clung to the almost hairless grey leather of their hides. They were the most pathetic animals we had ever seen. Yet their run-down condition did not affect their pride. They stared at us with haughty glares until we passed.

It was a relief to get out of their sight and find ourselves on a good highway. We galloped on into Manhui, about a mile beyond. It was a typical frontier town, built along a single street leading to the mission compound. The shops on both sides were crowded and wares were spread in the street, as it was some sort of market day; so we dismounted, and led our horses. No one seemed particularly surprised to see galloping horsemen ride into town, but as soon as we dismounted, they saw we were foreigners, and we drew a lot of attention. I caught the word "Russian" from one knot of men by a saddle store. Other parties from camp had ridden over now and then to see Father Schram, but apparently Americans were still not well known here.

Father Schram was walking in the compound when we entered, and was delighted to see us. He was a tall, distinguished-looking Belgian with a ruddy complexion, blue eyes, and white hair, mustache, and goatee. Although he was wearing a dark Chinese skull-cap and a Chinese-style robe, he looked very out of place in China. He greeted us with great enthusiasm and, after showing Lao Tsai where to leave the horses, led us inside. His comfortable parlor and adjoining study were very simply furnished, but were as European as his own appearance.

Our host's range of interests was enormous, and we could not bring up any topic of border lore that he was not able to discuss at length. One of my companions had a morbid interest in bandits, and Father Schram had plenty to tell him.

"The most notorious bands in western Suiyuan are the farmers of Ta-shun-chen—around your camp—," he said, between puffs on his long Dutch pipe. "They had the country terrorized before Fu came; traveling far to raid other villages. They are so poor that very little seems much to them, and they are so cruel."

He explained the situation by saying that the winters were long and hard. Not that there was much snow, but the temperature gets very low and the land is frozen solid. Meanwhile home industries—aside from knitting—have never been developed to any extent, due

partly to the general shiftlessness of these border immigrants, and partly to the lack of raw materials such as wood; so time hangs heavy. Thus, the men become restless, and find a natural outlet in bandit raids.

Some of Father Schram's bandit stories were quite grisly, but others had a touch of humor. One of the more entertaining involved a fine old priest who lived in a village south of Shanpa. He was the sort of man who could never believe ill of anybody. One day one of the young Chinese farmers of his parish came and asked him to say a mass for success in business; to be paid for later. The farmer did not mention what the undertaking was, and the priest neglected to ask him. The mass was said, and the farmer left town.

He returned some days later, looking very content and prosperous in new clothes, and gave a substantial donation to the church in thanks for prayers granted. It was not until several years had passed that the trusting old priest discovered the nature of the "business trip." It had been a raid on the storehouses and granary of the head mission at San-sheng-kung!

When the conversation wandered on to the Mongols and Lamaism, it turned out that he once had had a parish at Kumbum, in Kokonor, the holy city of the Mongols, second only to Lhasa in Tibet. He never complained of his present post among the border Chinese, but when he spoke of Kumbum, his eyes lit up and I knew that his heart was still among the Mongols and Tibetans out there.

He urged me to try to see something of the Mongols while I was up here. He told me about a number of lama temples at the mouths of the principal passes along the base of the range, and suggested that though they had now deteriorated, they were still centers of Mongol culture, and the best introduction to Mongol life.

He said with regret that he had not been out to see the Mongols and their temples for years; and that of late his only outside interest was in his books, from which he was completing studies begun at Kumbum, as well as writing a local history of this region. When he was younger, though, he had explored the whole range, he said, and had even come upon the tombs of the Tangut kings, who had ruled this land before Jenghis came. He described to us the broken tablets, in a forgotten language, that he had recovered from the royal burial places, but he would not even hint where the tombs were.

When we returned to camp in the late afternoon, all the way home my eyes were not for the Chinese farmers, nor for their crops and their herds. I was looking beyond, to the mountains on the western horizon, trying to guess where the passes were, where the Tangut kings were buried, and where the Mongols had built their temples. But the biggest question in my mind was, what lay over the mountains in the Gobi? Even Father Schram had been unable to answer that.

6

THE VICTORY IN SHANPA

ON THE EVENING of August 13th, the camp doctor and I went out for one of our cross-country rides after supper. We came back at dusk feeling very exhilarated, and dropped in to see a magic show that Fred was giving for a company of Chinese soldiers in the next compound. I had seen these particular acts before, but he was always good, and a clever Chinese interpreter was giving some novel twists to his explanations. He was in the middle of the silver-hoop trick, and the audience was very attentive. Suddenly someone shouted in through the window in Chinese, *Wo-men sheng-li!* "We are victorious!"

Forgetting all about the performance, we all ran over to the radio room in time to hear the end of the first releases from Chungking. The American reporters there were testing the programs they wanted to have relayed to the States. They sounded a little artificial, as though they had been prepared too long in advance, but the news was good and we were not feeling too critical.

When the broadcasts were over, we wandered around from room to room in a half daze, discussing what we would do when we got home. I went back and started a letter to my wife, to tell her how glad I was to hear that the war was over and that we would soon be together again. I expected we would all be recalled to Chungking immediately, and once there it would only be a matter of waiting for priorities to get home for discharge from the Navy. Later that night, after extended celebration, we heard a rebroadcast of President Truman's impressive speech on the effects of the first atom bomb and the responsibilities its discovery had imposed on our civilization.

The next day the camp was more than usually disorganized. Most of us spent our time in the radio shack, trying to get more details. Now and then some Chinese officer would come in to ask about the new atom bomb, *yuan-tzŭ tan,* they called it. Was it really

true about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they would ask? Could the thing actually flatten a city? We had to admit that we did not know any more than they did, as all we knew was what we had heard over the radio, relayed by Chinese stations.

"If we could only use one of them on Yenan, and wipe out the Communists!" said one high-ranking Chinese, with a hopeful leer.

All the Chinese around camp were bitter about the late entrance of the Russians into the Far Eastern War. "They were only waiting until they were sure they couldn't lose anything!" was the usual comment.

"They're just after our Northeastern Provinces (Manchuria); hoping to get in before we can!"

"—and what about Jehol, Chahar, even Suiyuan?" someone would add.

The mood of last night was passing. They were speaking as realists, not as enthusiastic victors.

These were outsiders, however, Chinese from the southern provinces and more cosmopolitan in their outlook. The local people were still very happy when we rode into town that afternoon. Suiyuan had suffered much from the long war, and they were relieved that it was over.

In fact the War in Suiyuan had lasted longer—continuously—than in any other province. Fighting broke out in northern Suiyuan in 1936, a year before the incident at Marco Polo Bridge. Though never declared, it was a full-scale war, with the Japanese using all their strength against the armies of General Fu.

I was in Kueihua that summer, on my way to Paotou, when the first rumors of the opening battles trickled down from the Northeast. The local Chinese were inclined to discount them at first, saying that the Japanese were only trying to impress Prince Tê of the West Sunit Banner, and other influential Mongols, whom they hoped to get as allies. Only Torgny Oberg, a Swedish trader and Mongol expert living in Kueihua, seemed to take a serious view of the situation. He told me he was convinced that this news meant that the Japanese were beginning an all-out offensive. Realizing their failure to win over the leaders of the Mongols, they were now using force to drive a wedge between the northern provinces of China, which were their next objective, and Outer Mongolia, from which the Chinese might possibly get Russian aid.

After returning to South China, and ultimately to America, I followed the course of the war in Suiyuan in the papers. It grew more and more intense as the Japanese, with puppets from Manchukuo and from among the Chahar Mongols, pushed on to the great lamasery town of Beiling Miao, which ultimately became the capital of their "Autonomous" Mongolian State. The Chinese with loyal Mongol cavalry fought hard to oppose them, but the invaders had mechanized equipment. It was a losing struggle.

Soon after the larger war broke out in 1937, the Japs seized control of the railway from Peking. Kueihua, the provincial capital, fell on October 14th, and Paotou was taken three days later.

Governor Fu fled southwest and in time set up his headquarters at Wuyuan, the only town still left to him. However, even this was not safe. Father Schram told me how a Japanese column had invaded this western part of the Hou-t'ao Plain on their great raid in January 1940, pursuing Governor Fu who had just attempted an attack on Paotou. The Chinese troops fled south, and the Japanese overran the district. Father Schram claimed to have saved Shanpa from destruction. The Japanese commander who had taken over his house announced that he was planning to burn that village, but the old priest had succeeded in persuading him that it was not worth the effort, since all Chinese soldiers had long since fled and only poor peasants were left to suffer from it. After a short occupation, the Japanese fell back on the ruins of Wuyuan, where they set up a garrison. Not long afterwards the Chinese gave them a crushing defeat in a surprise attack. Most of the Japanese were massacred.

After that, the war in the Northwest had settled down to a stalemate. The garrison at Paotou did not venture south of there. In fact, guerilla action kept them pretty well confined within the city. Even though the railroad from Peking was never permanently cut, so that the Japanese continued to receive supplies, all the stations along the line had to be transformed into individual forts. Meanwhile, General Fu had returned and made his headquarters in the small village of Shanpa, practically the only place that remained to him. But he was unable to do much more than supply the guerillas, and send out small raiding parties.

Our camp had originally been set up to train more efficient guerillas, teaching them demolition, etc., as well as to serve as a weather station. In the last year of the war several Americans from there

went out with guerilla columns to "the front." This was the area at the base of the mountains from Wuyuan to Sarachi (Sa-hsien), where Suiyuan provincial troops, Mongol puppets, and Japanese agents mingled quite freely, especially for smuggling purposes. In effect, it was a sort of No-Man's Land around the islands of Japanese occupation at Paotou and Sarachi.

It would seem that little military activity went on there in the last years of the war except when small American-led sorties went out and stirred up the hornet's nest. Most of the Americans came back very disillusioned with the situation out there. They claimed that they saw more of smuggling, and traffic in opium, between various highly questionable characters of the frontier and the Chinese with them, including their own interpreters, than they did of fighting. Rarely did they see action, although several times they found themselves under fire from armored trains along the Peking-Paotou Railroad.

That evening General Fu invited the American officers to a Victory Banquet, and the rest of the camp to a Victory Celebration at the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall in town. At the evening's feast, we Americans were elated at the thought of the War being over and the prospects of our getting home. By and large the Chinese officials and military officers were happy for the same reasons. However, for some, the end of the War meant the termination of vast revenues from illicit opium and Japanese goods. For others from the south, it meant the threat of civil war, when they would be called upon to fight their own people instead of the invaders. For everyone it meant great changes.

General Fu himself looked extremely worried when we first sat down to table, and his face drooped in the moments between the ceremonial toasts when he was able to relax and be himself. Perhaps he was already thinking of the problems he would have in handling the Communists.

When the food came on, everyone seemed to forget their private thoughts in the sheer pleasure of eating. First we had four dishes of cold hors d'oeuvres, including the "thousand-year-old eggs," spiced meats, and pickled vegetables. Then came a series of large platters in succession, each greeted with ample toasts of "rose-petal dew" from Ninghsia. Cantonese sharks' fins in a rich seafood gravy were followed by crisp bamboo shoots from Szechuan, garnished with a

kind of fungus. Then came pieces of chicken fried in deep fat, with spiced salt to dip them in. Then they brought on a deeper bowl of sea slugs, more bamboo shoots, and tender greens. These were followed by a huge carp in sweet and sour sauce, a whole chicken swimming in thin gravy, and a local specialty of whipped eggs and bacon.

When the last of these was cleared away, we had another round of toasts, a little longer than the previous ones, and a chance to compliment our host on the wonderful food he was giving us. Meanwhile the servants cleared the table, and brought us each clean bowls and porcelain scoops. These were for the dessert: a high, round pudding called "Eight Precious Jewels Rice" (*pa-pao fan*). Its basis was a very sweet and rather firm rice pudding, cooked in sugar syrup; in it were slices of sweet melon, candied fruits, and other confections, making up eight kinds of "precious things."

A Chinese meal never ends with dessert. We were only at the middle of the banquet. The servants brought us yet another set of bowls and scoops, and water to rinse our chopsticks, and we began again. This was the post-wine part of the feast, when the drinking of the last toasts made it possible to go on to the rice. We each had a large bowl of rice, imported from South China, and platters of steamed bread—the usual North China substitute for rice—with some more center dishes. These consisted of diced chicken fried with very hot red peppers, steamed cabbage garnished with small dried shrimps, croquettes of pork and eggplant, and shredded cucumber soup.

The night's celebration at Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall was made up partly of some magic acts given by Fred, and partly of theatricals by General Fu's private troupe. The actors were mostly young boys, some of them taking the parts of women, and the few adult actors looked ridiculously large by comparison. Luckily they gave some traditional battle scenes with plenty of acrobatics, so the American half of the audience was less restless than usual. Only one act was given to the nerve-rasping falsetto "singing" that we all found so hard to bear.

All through the performance the General's face looked almost haggard, and every time I looked in that direction, he was deep in conversation with his chief general. The result of their consultation was apparent next day, when a friend rode out from town to say that General Fu had suddenly left for Paotou, taking his crack troops.

From then on, events in the province moved fast. The next news we heard was that General Fu had pushed on to Kueihua, his old capital, and that before leaving Paotou, he had hurriedly ordered a general conscription of all males between fifteen and fifty.

We heard various explanations of this. One rumor said that Fu had called them up to fill the gaps created by a mass desertion of his cavalrymen. The latter were supposed to have skipped out with their rifles and horses to resume banditry, or to join the Communists. I might add that in the minds of the Belgian priests and the local gentry there was no distinction between the two actions. Another explanation said that the conscription was a forced measure to fill out the army rolls. Officers in China draw their salaries according to the number of men under them, and the number of soldiers in the Suiyuan Army had to be rapidly increased to conform to the figures listed in Chungking before the Government inspectors came around. Whatever the reason for it, this conscription left the farms depleted of all able hands just before the harvests, and the prospects for getting the crops in safely were black.

Meanwhile, our own situation was very uncertain. My mission ended with the end of the War, and all nine of us were anxious to start back to Chungking as soon as we could get orders to do so. I sent several dispatches to the original leader of the convoy, who was technically still in charge of us, asking him what to do with the personnel and equipment I had brought north. All these went unanswered. I learned much later that he had been transferred to another part of China about that time, and had other things to worry about. Meanwhile, it was not at all reassuring to know that we were forgotten, in remote Inner Mongolia.

Not only the lack of orders, but several other matters that I had overlooked in the optimism of victory night left us stranded for fair. The new clutch plate I had requested, to replace the one burned out on the last day of our trip north, had not yet arrived. Furthermore, we heard that the Yellow River was swollen high with the late summer floods, making the crossings virtually impossible for a heavy truck. It looked as though, orders or no orders, we would be stuck for some time.

Things were no better for the rest of the Americans there. Most of them had nothing to do either, and were just as anxious to leave, but they were forced to stay until the C.O. got word to close the

camp. After a few days, three or four men did get individual orders, and among them was our doctor, who was no longer needed since the camp had its permanent physician. No more dispatches came through, and the rest of us seemed doomed to weeks of waiting. How many weeks no one knew.

The sense of great relief that had swept over us when we heard the news of victory was succeeded by an equally deep depression. Occasional wild rides across country and evening feasts in town were not enough to combat the overwhelming feeling of disgust at the monotony in camp. The men most affected by it were the two or three who could not ride or did not want to, and the few who had made up their minds not to like Chinese food. But we all felt it. Day followed dismal day, stomachs rebelled at the local Chinese gin, and poker palled.

7

OUR FIRST LAMASERY

A FEW DAYS after the victory, in the course of a conversation with some of the men who had come with me, I broached the idea of a trip toward the mountains. It seemed that as long as we were in Mongolia, with nothing to do until orders and the new clutch plate arrived, we might as well make the best of our situation and try to see something of the Mongols.

Since Father Schram had suggested that the lamaseries at the edge of the range were centers of Mongol life, I thought we might begin by visiting one of them. According to our Chinese sketch map of the locality, Beilighe Temple was the nearest one and Lao Tsai knew the way there, so that seemed the logical place to see first.

Next morning, Fred the magician, the camp doctor, another fellow, and I got together some blankets, in case we found it was too far away to get back the same night, and some small gifts for the abbot. Then we collected Lao Tsai and, mounting our horses, headed west for the mountains. About an hour's hard riding beyond our swimming pond, we came to a small river. This was the Wu-chia Ho, a branch of the Yellow River. Not long ago, the Yellow River itself had flowed through here, for it was only comparatively recently that it had changed its course further to the south, to pass by modern San-sheng-kung.

We dismounted and climbed aboard a small ferry-scow over a narrow plank. Then Lao Tsai led the horses alongside through the water, and made them jump in over the side. The first two were very calm about it, but the rest were extremely frightened. They heaved backward against the pull on the reins, rolling their eyes wildly. When they finally lunged aboard, we thought their hoofs would go right through the planking.

On the far bank, Lao Tsai turned off the main trail and led us to a cluster of farm buildings in a grove of willows. An old man came

out to meet us, and Lao Tsai introduced him as Li Wen-ta. I gathered that this must be the "Farmer Li" we had heard so much about in camp. He was a wealthy landowner and local magistrate, and because the territory under his jurisdiction extended into the mountains where the Mongols lived, he had had considerable dealings with them. He had even learned Mongolian, and was a kind of honorary member of the Oirat Banner from which he had obtained his land. The year before he had taken small groups from camp to Beilighe Temple to see festivals, and had helped some of the Americans to buy Mongol knives, buddhas, and other curios—at great profit to himself.

When he heard where we were going, he assured me that the Mongols at Beilighe Temple did not speak any Chinese, so we would have to have him as interpreter. He said that he was just starting for the mountains anyhow on an official errand, and would have to pass by there on the way. For some strange reason he preferred to walk, although anyone of any means in that part of the world always traveled by horse or donkey. He surprised us by his fast pace. Though he claimed to be over sixty, he kept up with the horses easily, as long as they did not trot.

He and I had a long talk on the way, about the Mongols and their customs. According to him, they lived in forest parks "in the middle of the mountains." The mountains looked very bare from here, but it was always possible that there might be hidden forests up some of the gorges. The idea of seeing the Mongols in their almost inaccessible homes appealed to us, as he no doubt figured it would. He offered to take us there sometime, and the look he gave me completed his thought—for a consideration. Meanwhile he tried to impress on me that it would be impossible for us ever to get to see any Mongols without his help. Finally, he must have realized that he was overplaying his part, for he switched back to the subject of the mountains.

"The rocks have many metals," he said, "such things as iron and silver, and even gold. But the Mongols will not let us take any out." He went on to blame this obstacle to progress on the reactionary lamas, but I knew from speaking to others that the objection to mining was not confined to the priests. They were only maintaining an old Mongol policy. Like many other nomad rulers elsewhere, the Mongol chieftains had always objected to anything such as large-

scale mining, that would give a tribe property interests holding them to a given district. For this would make it impossible for them to wander any distance in search of better hunting or grazing, and would destroy their greatest asset in warfare, mobility.

While we were talking, I caught sight of the monastery in the distance. A deep gorge cutting down through the range left a dark slash against the lighter color of the reddish cliffs. Outlined against this, at the mouth of the gorge, was a high, natural terrace. On this I could just make out a number of large, square, pink and white buildings. Drawing nearer, we could even catch the glint of gilded roof ornaments. Then we lost sight of it again as we crossed the hot, dry sand in the original course of the Yellow River, at the base of the mountains. On the far side of this strip of desert, Farmer Li led us up a narrow boulder-strewn path, and at the top we found ourselves on the terrace, which spread in a flat, fan-shaped plain before the temple buildings.

We first came to a row of plain adobe dwellings. Originally they must have been red—a favorite color with the lamas—but they had now faded into a pink that blended well with the pinkish clay of the terrace. Once these buildings had served as a residence for some of the monks, but a vertical blue signboard with white characters announced in Chinese that they were now occupied by a Government primary school for the West Wing of the Oirat Banner. Several young pupils, from about seven to fourteen years of age, ran out to greet us. They seemed to be likable lads, but were obviously poverty stricken. One or two had on torn Mongol robes; the rest were dressed in patched and faded Chinese uniforms.

Farmer Li announced that the school had been set up by agreement between the "Princess of the Western Oirats" and Governor Fu. It was one of several such schools, he told me, that were intended to teach the Chinese language and Chinese Nationalist aims to the young Mongols so they could take their places in the New China. I wondered why the "Princess"—actually a Duchess by title—had agreed to this movement to destroy the native culture of her people. Later, I learned, however, that like most of the other decadent rulers of the present-day Mongols, she was little more than a tool in the hands of Chinese border politicians.

The only man from camp who got to meet her was the doctor, who had had her for a short while as a patient. Soon after Fu re-

occupied Paotou, she and her young son—an honorary Colonel at the age of nine—together with the Prince of the Dalat Banner and several other Mongol nobles who had been spending the war years in Shanpa, moved east to their old homes. They must have been glad to go. During the war, we heard, these Mongol rulers were, practically speaking, mere hostages for the good behavior of their people and had had no real freedom under the watchful eyes of General Fu.

Behind the Mongol school stood the monastery buildings proper. The square mass of the main temple rose prominently in the foreground on an artificial terrace. It was painted white, with a horizontal band of dark red encircling the top. On its roof we saw a golden, eight-spoked wheel, flanked by two gazelles. I explained to the others that this was the equivalent of a cross on a Christian church, the symbol of the religion, and that it was intended to recall Buddha's first sermon, when he "turned the Wheel of the Law" in the deer park outside Benares.

Below the wheel, over the main door which was set back in a recessed porch, was the temple nameboard. A blue tablet with gold lettering, in a frame of writhing dragons, it gave the name of the temple in three languages: Mongolian, Chinese, and Tibetan. At first I was a little surprised to see the Tibetan, but it was not inappropriate, since Mongolian Lamaism is essentially the Tibetan form of Buddhism, with only a very few local innovations. The Mongols first adopted Lamaism as their state religion under Khubilai Khan in the 13th century. They lost it again when they were driven out of China less than a hundred years later, but were reconverted by Tibetan missionaries at the end of the 16th century. In the meantime, most of them had gone back to their primitive religion, Shamanism, though some remained faithful to Nestorian Christianity, a faith very popular in China during the Mongol Dynasty. Even now, while most Mongols are ardent followers of Lamaism, a few of the Mongols of Inner Mongolia are Mohammedans, like those we had met at the third Yellow River crossing.

As we stood looking at the front of this large temple, Farmer Li came out of a side building with an intelligent-looking youth of about sixteen. He told us that this was the abbot's chief disciple. The abbot himself had gone with most of his monks to visit Shandagu Temple, another monastery further up the range, but his disciple would act as host and make us welcome.

The boy took us into a small, dark guest room, and poured us cups of tea, then he went out to look for the keys to the temple buildings. While he was gone, I talked in Chinese to the old lama who had prepared the tea. He had twinkling eyes, a perpetual smile, and a droopy moustache of only a few hairs that made an amusing contrast with Farmer Li's well-trimmed, but rather heavy one. He told me that he had traveled to Peking and even as far as Shanghai in the retinue of the late Panchen Lama, when the latter was an exile from Tibet. He liked traveling, he said, but he was getting old and the Panchen was dead. Being an Oirat he had come home to pass his last days in this temple of his Banner.

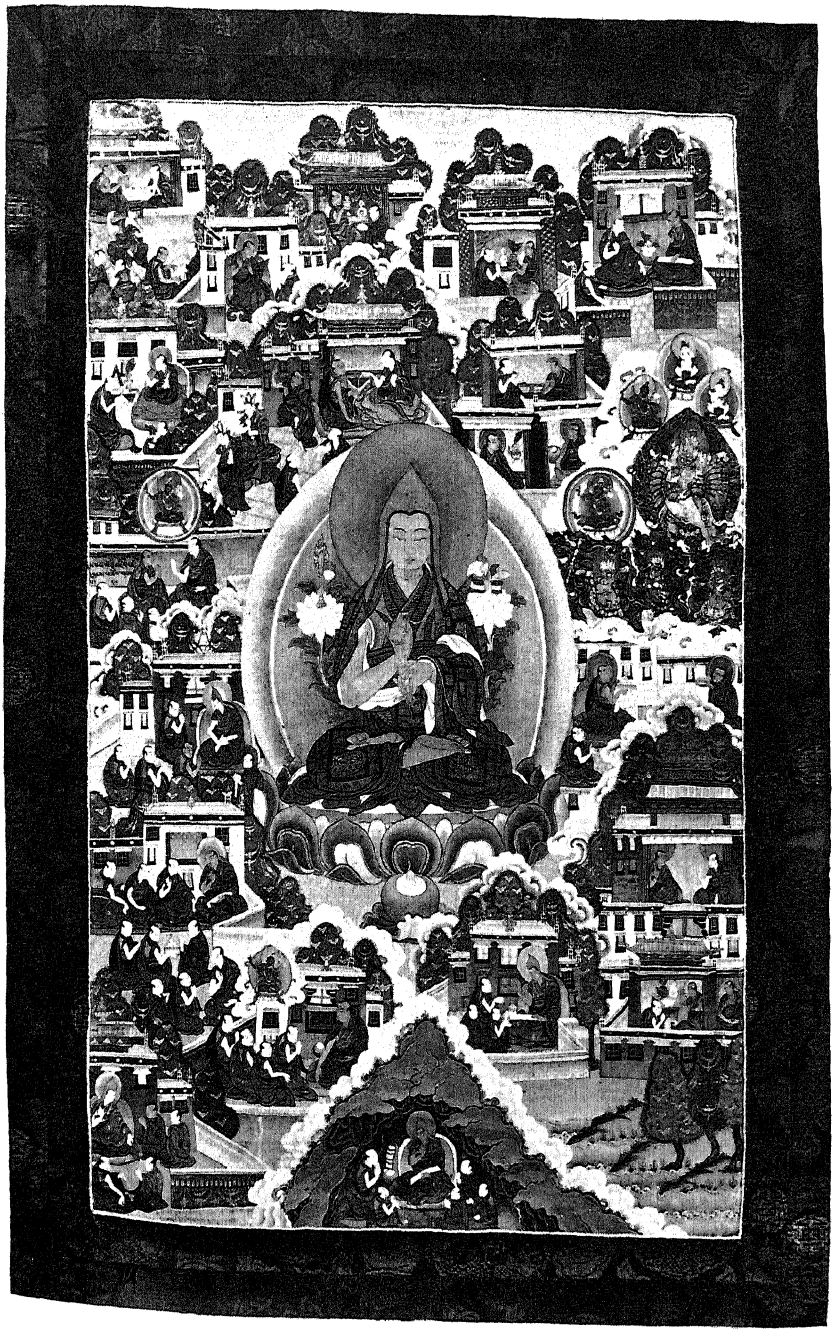
We talked about Peking and its temples, and famous lama shrines elsewhere. He told me that there were several larger temples, well worth seeing, not far from here, and that we would no doubt be welcomed if we wanted to visit them.

Farmer Li had been looking rather grim, as though he were annoyed to have me find that he was not indispensable after all. At this remark about our being welcome at other temples, his eyes narrowed and his jaws clamped firmly. He soon said goodbye, and strode away, up the trail that entered the gorge.

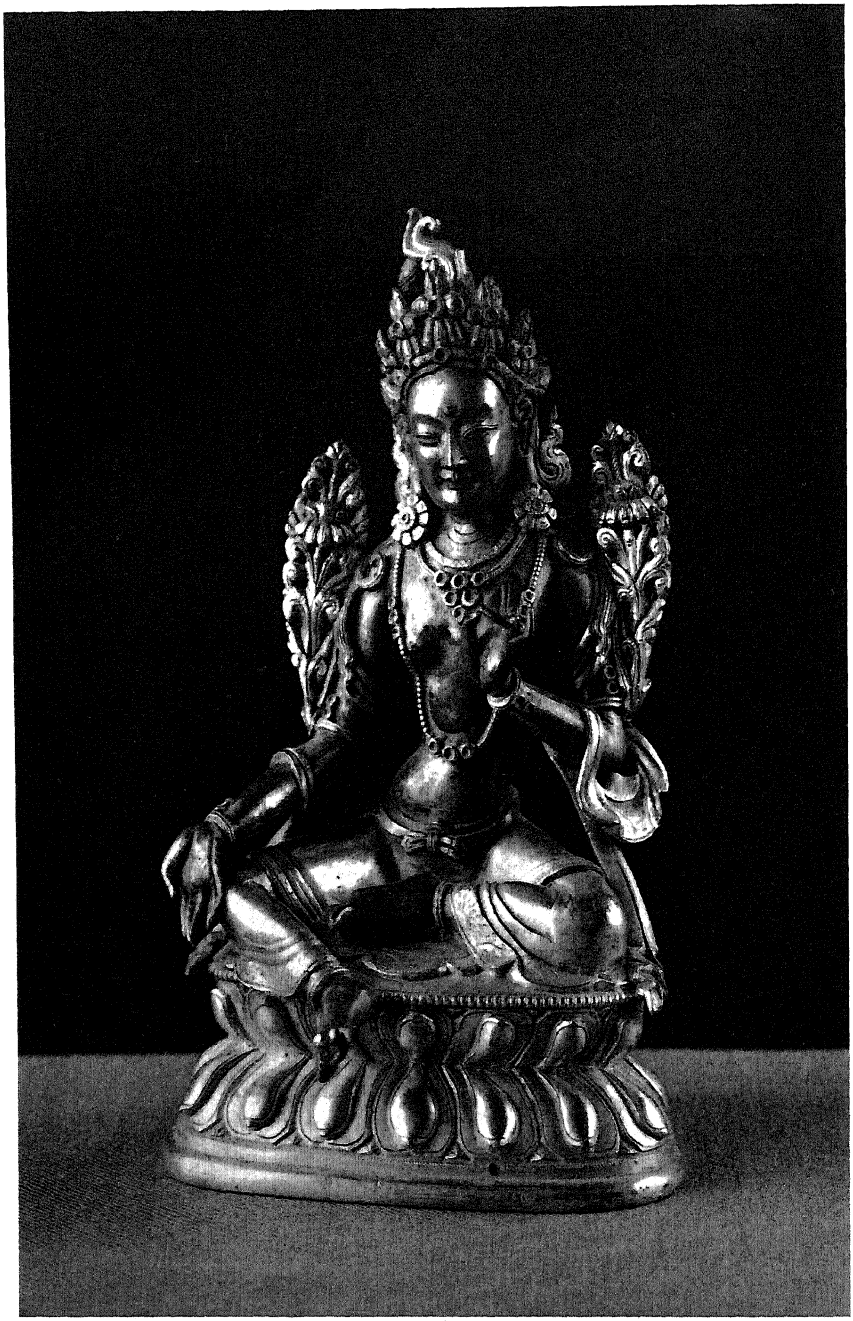
The abbot's disciple then came back with a heavy cluster of iron keys, and a retinue composed of young lama novices and pupils from the Oirat school.

The youngsters looked at us with such wide-eyed awe, mixed with a certain amount of amusement at our appearances, that Fred felt they should have something to be awed about. He leaned over and plucked a Chinese silver dollar from the old lama's boot. The latter started in surprise. Fred smothered a smile and drew out another and another. The young Mongols looked amazed, even frightened. One laughed nervously, as though he felt that it must all be a joke, but he could not be sure. It was obvious that none of them had ever seen anything like it.

The abbot's disciple seemed to be the most nervous of the lot. He realized that this magic was something beyond his experience, possibly something connected with evil powers, and seemed to be trying to decide whether he should permit such goings-on in sacred precincts. He finally handled the situation very diplomatically by suggesting that we might want to see the main temple.



Tsong Kapa, founder of the Reformed Sect, with episodes from his life.
(*Courtesy of the Newark Museum.*)



Tara, the Green Goddess. Gilded bronze image from a Mongol lamasery.
(*Photo by Reuben Goldberg.*)

From the building's exterior we did not know what to expect, as it was severely plain except for the wheel and gazelles, and the name-board. But we were not disappointed. The rather low ceiling inside was supported by slender red columns, between which ran vertical rows of prayer benches made of planks raised a few inches off the floor. There were two rows of these on either side of the main aisle. They extended the length of the main hall, and seemed to emphasize its depth. The two nearest the aisle on each side were covered with long, brightly colored prayer rugs, patterned in large squares of design to mark the seat for each monk at the services.

On the side walls were painted a succession of equally bright pictures of Tsong Kapa, the founder of the Reformed Sect, to which the Mongols belonged, surrounded by a vivid mosaic of lesser Buddhist figures. The hall terminated in a wall hung with temple banners, mounted in rich brocades, and against it stood the abbot's throne of lacquered and gilded wood.

Low doors on either side of the throne led into the sanctuary proper, which in Mongol temples is usually shut off from view. Here were massive images of Tsong Kapa and his two chief disciples, and the Buddha with his two attendants, together with an odd assortment of saints and demons. The demons were horrible to behold, wearing crowns of skulls and necklaces of severed heads, and trampling corpses underfoot.

On the roof of an adjoining temple we found a shrine dedicated to the chief demons of this group. Most of them were Tibetan gods of the pre-Buddhist (Bon) faith, who had been assimilated into Lamaism, and had nothing to do with Buddhism, as such. The abbot's disciple showed us how they were worshiped to the braying of thigh-bone trumpets and the rattling of small drums. The latter were made by riveting the tops of two human skulls back-to-back, and stretching skin tightly over the openings. The young lama seemed very nervous to be there, and looked quite frightened when I peered behind a heavy curtain at the rear of the room. In back of it were massive images of the demons, including the dreaded Erlik Khan, Lord of Death, with his hideous bull's head, its huge jaws dripping blood.

In front of the curtain hung a set of paintings depicting these demons as invisible spirits. The crowns of skulls were there, and the

necklaces of heads; so were the swords and other weapons they usually brandished, and the trodden corpses, lying prostrate. But where the figures should have been were blank spaces, through which blazed the wall of flames in the background. Our guide explained that the deities were considered too terrible for the worshipers to look upon, and the latter were expected to fill the spaces by their own imagination. Also, one form of prayer to the demons was to concentrate on the paintings until the demons seemed to come and take their places in them.

As we wandered around the lamasery, we saw several simplified methods of saying prayers, all of which showed considerable mechanical skill. On one small altar, for example, we saw a hand prayer wheel. This was a copper cylinder about four inches high and three in diameter, closed at both ends, with a thin metal rod projecting up through the lid. The old lama opened it and showed us that the rod was a movable axle around which was wound a very long strip of paper, inscribed in Tibetan with the ancient Buddhist prayer, *Om mani padme hum,* "Hail, O Jewel in the Lotus, amen," repeated hundreds of times. By simply twirling the rod and setting it spinning, the lamas felt that they gained as much merit by each revolution as they would have by repeating the prayer as many times as it was written on the roll of paper.

Our lama guide then took us into a small square building in the court in front of the main temple. It was about fourteen feet high, we estimated, and eight feet on a side. Inside was a huge six-sided barrel that almost filled it. It was painted red, with the six syllables *Om ma-ni pad-me hum,* in Sanskrit letters, one on each panel along with a sacred picture. He said that inside it the lamas had put all the hundred and eight volumes of the Buddhist holy scripture, and that a single revolution was the equivalent of reading them all, something it would take several monks many months to do by actual reading.

Finally, on the roof of the principal temple we saw wind wheels that seemed to us the greatest refinement of this labor-saving quest for spiritual merit. These consisted of a large roll of prayer papers, about five times as thick as that in the hand prayer wheel, inscribed with the same prayer, *Om mani padme hum.* The roll was encased in a leather cylinder, built around a metal axle, the lower end of which fitted into a deep socket in the edge of the roof, and at the top of each axle were soldered four metal cups that caught the wind like a

child's pin wheel. At first glance they looked to us like crude versions of the wind gauge at the camp's weather station.

I gathered from all this that Lamaism in Mongolia had sunk to the condition I had found in the Tibetan border regions. The Lama religion originally had a great heritage from the high philosophy of Indian Buddhism, though this had been tainted during the Middle Ages by baser elements from the more depraved forms of Hinduism and from some of the primitive Tibetan cults. Nowadays, however, its philosophy seems to have been largely forgotten. The Tibetan monks spend their time thinking up new ways to gain money, or trying to devise better means to obtain merit with the minimum of effort. The lamas here in Mongolia seemed to have succeeded quite well with the latter, and judging by the apparent wealth of Beilighe Temple—even though we later learned that it had already been looted by the Chinese—they must also be good at gaining money from the other Mongols.

Recollections of former travels in West Tibet came back to me in force as we strolled up beyond the last temple and found a magnificent chorten, silhouetted against the dark mouth of the gorge. It seemed unusually white, with an almost supernatural glow that contrasted sharply with the background and with the thunder clouds gathering over the peaks above. The scene inevitably recalled a view in another pass, through the Himalayas, on the ancient road to Leh.

The chorten is an essentially Tibetan adaptation of an ancient Buddhist monument called a stupa, but it has been so extensively borrowed by the Mongols that it seems equally typical of Mongolia. This one, like all stupas, had both a symbolic and a practical purpose; though the first has been forgotten by most present-day lamas. Symbolically, the monument represented an ancient conception of the Universe in miniature. Its rectangular base represented the Earth, which most Asiatic peoples consider as flat, and square. The bulbous part, that rose above this, represented the dome of the sky. Its slender spire had thirteen rings to recall the Thirteen Heavens, and the disc in the crescent at the top were the Sun and Moon. Highest of all was a leaf-shaped projection representing a wisp of flame that symbolized Divine Knowledge.

More practically, the chorten was a reliquary to house the remains of a former abbot. I could not imagine a more fitting tomb than this particular monument. With the mountains towering behind it, it

looked down on the temple the abbot had once ruled, and on out over the plain. The latter was now beginning to darken with the shadows of the storm clouds, but the setting sun in the distance picked out the willow groves around the larger farms. The whole world of the Chinese immigrants seemed so remote up here.

My revery was broken by the abbot's disciple, who came up to invite us to supper. In the guest room the monks offered us their usual fare, which consisted mainly of bowls of coarse wheaten noodles with lumps of boiled mutton, served in a cloudy soup. They gave us bitter pickles to garnish it with, and buttered tea thickened with flour to wash it down. I was the only one able to eat a full share. The doctor was almost sick at the sight of it, and urged that, in spite of the coming storm, we should return to camp where we could sleep better and get a good breakfast.

As we rode back through the twilight, lightning began to flash in the dark clouds above the peaks. We did not think much about it, as these evening storms were usually confined to the mountain range. We got as far as the ferry, barely halfway home, without incident. Then suddenly the storm broke right overhead. Constant lightning lit up the whole plain. It transformed one particularly dreary stretch of sagebrush and desert near the swimming pond into a wild and eerie scene, reminding me of the witches' heath in *Macbeth.*

Our horses were frantic. They wanted to bolt down every side path. Luckily Lao Tsai knew the way well and led us by the most direct trail. The fourth member of the party was a very poor rider, and his horse was especially skittish as a result. He had a hard time keeping up with the group, so I dropped back to be near him in case of trouble. Several times we could not see the leaders, and I have seldom felt more lost. Once Lao Tsai rode back to find us. If it had not been for his calmness and knowledge of the way, it might have been very dangerous. The doctor suggested that the lama demons had been trying to punish us for invading their sanctuary.

As a result of this jaunt, I resolved to resume my study of border peoples and lama temples which I had begun nine years before in Jehol. I decided that on every trip I would take some of the other restless men along with me. Even if they did not share my immediate interest in the Mongols and their temples—and I did not expect them to—they could work off their excess energy in riding and climbing. Meanwhile, they would be good company.

8

THE MONGOLS AT HOME

A FEW DAYS after the trip to Beilighe Temple, I thought it might be interesting to see if there was any truth in the story of many Mongols living in forest parks "in the middle of the mountains." Even if it should turn out to be false, we would surely meet some Mongols along the way, and I was curious to see how they lived. I had seen some of their tents on a trip north of Paotou in 1936, but only from the outside. I had never actually been in one.

When I told Fred the magician that I planned to enter the mountains by one of the passes, he and his roommate, Walter Hill, both said they would be glad to come along. Fred Webster, the pharmacist's mate, had been eager to get to the mountains after the camp doctor told him about his visit to Beilighe Temple, so he came too.

These three were the most congenial companions I had on any of these trips. Each of them was interested in photography, and therefore very observant. Each had a good sense of humor and could accept bad conditions without complaining. In addition, each had individual talents that were useful on a trip. Fred's skill at magic almost always impressed the Mongols, and gained their good will; Hill had been in the Forestry Service in Minnesota, and knew a lot about outdoor life; while Webster, as an agricultural student, was a mine of information about the plants and animals we saw.

Lao Tsai was away that day, so we took young Hui as ma-fu. We headed straight for Beilighe Temple, since the pass behind it was the principal one visible from the camp, and it seemed the best way to enter the mountains. Moreover, the glimpse I had had of the gorge behind the chorten made me eager to explore it further.

We stopped at the temple for about an hour. I wanted to meet the abbot, who had just returned from Shandagu, and Hill and Webster wanted to see the temple, as it was their first visit. The abbot, Löpon Dorje by name, was a remarkable-looking old man. He had a rather coarse face pitted with smallpox scars, what the Russians

call a "potato nose," broad and shapeless, and an unusually heavy moustache and beard, white at the ends. His most striking features were his eyes. They were dark and calm, but when he looked at you, it seemed that his gaze—which was not rude enough to be called a stare, but was very penetrating—could see through to your inmost thoughts. He talked rather good Chinese in a deep, quiet voice, and was very cordial. He began by saying that he had heard about me from the old lama, and was impressed that I should be interested in his religion.

I asked him about Mongol settlements in the mountains, and he said there were no real settlements. I asked about forests, and he laughed. I now knew that Farmer Li had been telling us tall tales. Nonetheless, I was determined to climb the pass and try to find some Mongol homes. We drank the abbot's tea, gave him some small presents, and went down into the river bed that led into the gorge. It was almost dry, but littered with huge boulders that made walking difficult.

Almost immediately we came upon two of the dome-shaped tents that I had been looking for—the typical dwelling of the Mongol nomads. They are usually called "yurts" in books by Western writers, but are known to the Mongols themselves as *ger*. These were made of sheets of heavy felt, laid over collapsible wooden frames, and lashed down by hair ropes. We could see they were obviously contrived to provide a sturdy shelter, and yet be easily taken down to move from place to place. The things we especially noticed as we glanced inside were a round fire hole in the center of the floor, and a plain wooden box at the back, with offering bowls in front of it. I gathered that this must be some sort of household shrine. Both tents were empty, so we did not waste time there, but pushed on up the gorge.

We found a rough path that avoided most of the boulders, yet even here we encountered large stones that were hard on the horses' hoofs. They were shod only on the front feet, and two of them cast even these shoes before we had gone very far. It was clearly no place for horses, even though they were led; but hoofprints in the sand told of others that had passed there before us. For a distance there was even a cart track, then that disappeared up a side gorge, through which we could see a green meadow with some half-wild ponies grazing upon it.

As we walked up the river bed, leading our horses, the rock walls at each side were at first fairly low. This seemed to be merely a shelf or terrace at the foot of the range proper. Then, after about half a mile, the walls began to rise sharply as we came to the outer mountains of the range. These were weirdly eroded, with gaping tunnels and caves and oddly shaped projections. They seemed predominantly of reddish-brown sandstone, with long strata of other colors at irregular intervals. Some of these strata were black, where seams of coal came to the surface. Near them were patches of darker brown rock with rusty streaks that looked like iron ore. I could see what Farmer Li meant when he said that this region was rich in minerals.

The more resistant strata near the tops of the mountains were particularly dark, almost a chocolate brown, and black in the shadows. This no doubt accounts for the Mongol name of the range, Khara Narin Ula, "the black-pointed mountains."

Beyond a particularly high mountain with steeply eroded sides, the gorge forked sharply to the north, and the few hoof tracks that still remained also divided. We continued on straight ahead to the west, though the gorge seemed slightly narrower, because it looked like the most direct route through the mountains.

Almost immediately the dark, forbidding walls began to close in more and more, but inscriptions cut into the rock above the trail made us think that this was still the main pass. They were all in Tibetan script, common prayers like *Om mani padme hum,* and had probably been carved there by lamas, to acquire merit. These, I felt, were no doubt the "ancient inscriptions" that one of the officers from camp had spoken of seeing at the entrance to one of the passes as he was riding along the range on a hunting trip. I was very disappointed. From what he had said, I had hoped to find some really old inscriptions by the Tangut kings who had ruled here before Jenghis Khan, the ones whose tombs Father Schram had found.

Though the inscriptions kept on, the gorge itself became so narrow that the stream finally filled it completely, blocking further travel. It was too late to go back to the other fork, so we decided to camp there for the night.

We unsaddled and hobbled our horses, and built a fire on a crescent of sandy beach above the flowing stream. Then, after a light supper of rations we rolled up in our blankets beside the embers.

Between the rock walls above us the stars were very large and very bright through the clear atmosphere. Somewhere in the distance a wolf howled; otherwise, the only sound was that of the water running over pebbles, or the occasional click of a hoof against stone, as the horses grazed among the boulders.

Next morning we went back to the place where the gorge divided. On the projecting triangle of rock at the junction, we now saw a partially ruined stone watchtower that must once have guarded the pass. We had missed it the night before in the twilight. Looking up the fork, we saw several more ruins in the distance, so we assumed that this must be the main pass, and decided to explore it.

First I sent back the horses, since it seemed both useless and cruel to make them walk over this broken ground with loose or missing shoes. The ma-fu led them back to the temple while we continued along on foot with our blankets slung across our backs.

The other ruins mostly turned out to be neglected stone dwellings, rather than watchtowers like the first we saw. Most of them were roofless and very dilapidated. Whoever had lived in them had taken out all the precious wood when they moved on. The roof beams, doors, and window frames were too valuable to leave behind. This convinced me that Farmer Li's "forests" were a myth. As a matter of fact, the only trees we saw were occasional stunted ones scarcely larger than shrubs.

These huts seldom consisted of more than one large room, with the interior planned like a Mongol tent. They had a round fire pit in the center of the floor, and a deep niche in the rear wall that we assumed must be for the household shrine. Later we found that the huts had been built years before by seminomadic Mongol hunters and trappers, and that they were still used as temporary shelters by Mongol families traveling up and down the pass, when they were stormbound.

One of these stone houses, some distance above the trail, was still occupied. An old Chinese renegade came out to welcome us. He was wearing the traditional frontier farmer's tight-fitting woolen suit, that looked like old-fashioned long underwear. His Mongol wife and daughter both stood shyly in the doorway as we approached. The wife wore a simple dark robe, with a blue scarf around her hair. Elaborate jeweled pendants of silver set with coral hung from beneath the scarf, on each side of her head. Noticing our

curiosity about them, the old man said the Mongols called them *swiks.* His daughter wore the same kind of scarf and robe, but she only had small earrings for jewelry.

The man, looking about sixty but still very spry, turned out to be a hunter. He was very friendly and showed us his Mongol-style traps which were cleverly fashioned. When the smooth jaws were set open, the entire trap was covered by a piece of cloth like a shallow inverted bag, so arranged that if it were barely touched the jaws would snap together. He claimed that he caught anything from hares and pheasants to wolves and mountain sheep. He also showed us some pairs of large horns with a peculiar reverse curve to them. They must have belonged to the burhel, or "blue sheep," actually a form of mountain goat, that we had heard were quite common in these mountains.

When we told him we wanted to climb the pass to find some Mongols at home, he was not very encouraging. He warned us that they were shy people and afraid of foreigners. Many of them, he said, had never seen people like us and would probably run at our approach. (He illustrated the running motion very graphically with his hands.) He shook his head and said he doubted if we would see much of their home life.

Disregarding his discouraging remarks, we continued on, and after several miles of grueling walking, began to climb more steeply. Suddenly we came across two more yurts, in somewhat better condition than those we had seen on the river bed near the temple. Before the tents, two long lines of hair rope were pegged down to form a V, to which several she-goats were tethered for milking. An old woman came out of one of the tents to look at us. At first she seemed frightened, then she grinned. She could not understand any of my questions in Chinese, but offered us some goat's milk to drink, for which I gave her a packet of American needles.

From here we passed through an especially wild ravine, where the steeply-climbing trail was in places almost nonexistent. It led up a stream bed, where the water flowed in considerable quantity for short distances and then disappeared again into the ground. In places we could hear water flowing without being able to see it. Probably it was passing through underground caverns. Along here we flushed several flocks of greyish-purple partridges and some sand grouse, which, together with occasional skulls of mountain sheep and

some wolf tracks, indicated good hunting. Unfortunately, we were not equipped for it, having nothing better than side arms. There were still no trees; only rarely a gnarled shrub.

Then we began to come upon occasional tents again. We could usually anticipate them by the barking of the fierce dogs who warned of our coming before we even saw them. By the time we came past the tents, the animals would be secured by the children of the family sitting on their heads. Some of the children looked almost smaller than the huge dogs. They seemed very shy, but had bright expressions. Most of them wore small homespun robes, belted around the waist with a twisted cloth. We seldom saw their parents.

The first really respectable-looking yurt we came to was situated on the edge of a grassy meadow near the stream, which here emerged from its bed to flow a couple of hundred feet, only to disappear again into the sand. The number of goats on the hillside above us suggested considerable wealth—as the Mongols reckon wealth—and the owner, who came out to see why his dogs were barking, looked fairly prosperous. He had a white Chinese-style shirt, with relatively clean trousers of fine blue serge, tucked into a handsome pair of Mongol boots. His face looked proud and rather surly.

I asked in Chinese if we might enter the tent, and he consented with a curt nod. Under the decorated felt flap which hung down over the entrance were two small door panels, set in a wooden frame that made a high threshold. I remembered from reading Marco Polo's *Travels* that the Mongols of his day considered it very bad luck, as well as bad manners, to touch the threshold, and tried to avoid it. But in trying to get through the small doorway—barely four feet high—with my excessively long frame and a clumsy pack on my back, I kicked it twice. A deeper frown came over the handsome face of our host.

Inside, the first thing we noticed was the fire pit, set in a square hearth about three feet wide. A large, flaring pot of boiled milk stood on an iron spider grate over the coals. Our host, coming in behind me, took this off the fire and set in its place a heavy brass teapot, poking up the coals and putting more sticks on the fire. The smoke rose fairly straight through a round hole in the roof, that was partially covered by a movable felt outside, to give a better draft. This was obviously not always very efficient, as the wooden frame and the inside of the felts were black with soot.

The floor, of pounded earth, was covered with three sheets of felt matting. Behind the hearth, and on each side of it, lay finely woven saddle rugs of blue with tan and white patterns. As our host made no effort to offer the place of honor at the rear of the tent, we seated ourselves on the side rugs, and looked curiously around us.

At the back of the yurt, slightly to the left, stood the brightly painted wooden chests. The upper one had its sliding front panel partially raised to show some religious images, an icon in a figured silver case or "charmbox," and some small brass butter lamps and offering bowls. The lower chest was much larger and we assumed (correctly, as it turned out) that this was for storing clothing and grain. On a wooden rack at the right side hung metal cooking utensils, brass dippers, ladles, etc., and beside the rack stood a crude churn made of a narrow, hollowed log, about a foot in diameter and three feet high, bound around with metal hoops. From the rafters on the left, opposite us, dangled strips of dried mutton; below these, rolls of felt and skins for bedding had been pushed back against the wall.

All these things, we were to find, were typical of every tent. Only the quality of the furnishings differed according to the owners' means. Some, for example, would have plain chests, fewer images in the "god box," and perhaps no rugs.

On the floor at the rear, beside the chests, we also noticed several miniature, painted tables which resembled small stools. On these the wife had piled her jewelry before climbing the mountain to tend their goats. In addition to the two heavy swik pendants, made of silver set with turquoise and coral, we saw a pair of large turquoise-studded earrings, from which dangled three long chains of coral beads, ending in pendants of onyx. There was also a wide band of corals with a pendant fringe to fit around the back of the head, and a skullcap of solid silver plates.

I gathered that the Mongols, like the Tibetans I had known, must have the custom of using wedding jewelry in the form of a headdress for the bride—either as part of her dowry or a gift from the groom—to be worn throughout the rest of her life; and that these pieces belonged to a typical trousseau. That would also explain why the unmarried daughter of the old trapper had only the small earrings, and lacked the swik and other trimmings. All this jewelry, plus our host's silver-mounted sheath knife, and two or three silver-lined eat-

ing bowls of dark wood, lying together on another table, completed our first impression that this was a well-to-do Mongol family.

Our host knelt beside me on his right knee, with the other knee up. We tried to copy the pose but it was impossible for our weary legs after all that climbing, so we merely sat cross-legged. As a first gesture of hospitality, he pulled out his snuff bottle, a handsome one carved of tawny onyx, and offered it to me with both hands.

Knowing nothing about Mongol customs, I did not yet realize that I should have had one of my own to exchange for his, and that we should each have paused for a moment to admire the other's bottle, and then returned them with a bow. In my ignorance, I thought I was supposed to help myself to snuff. I took a pinch between my fingers and inhaled it, in the old European fashion. This, my first attempt at the art, was disastrous. I had taken just enough to make my nose itch, without producing the desired sneeze.

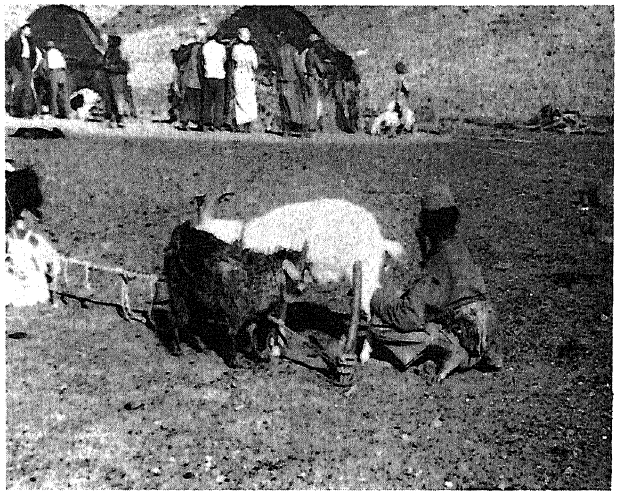
This additional *faux pas* of mine did not make our host any happier. He looked very surly and countered each polite remark that I made in Chinese with a torrent of Mongolian. It seemed a very guttural-sounding language as he spoke it, with *r*'s that rolled like thunder in the mountains.

I was about to give up any attempts at conversation, when his fourteen-year-old son came in and sat down near the entrance. He stared at us curiously for a minute, then pulled out of his robe a small leather sack, the scrotum of a newly killed goat. He blew it up like a balloon, then put it behind him and stared innocently at the fire. Suddenly a terrific sound cut the air from his direction—like a giant breaking wind and splitting his leathern breeches.

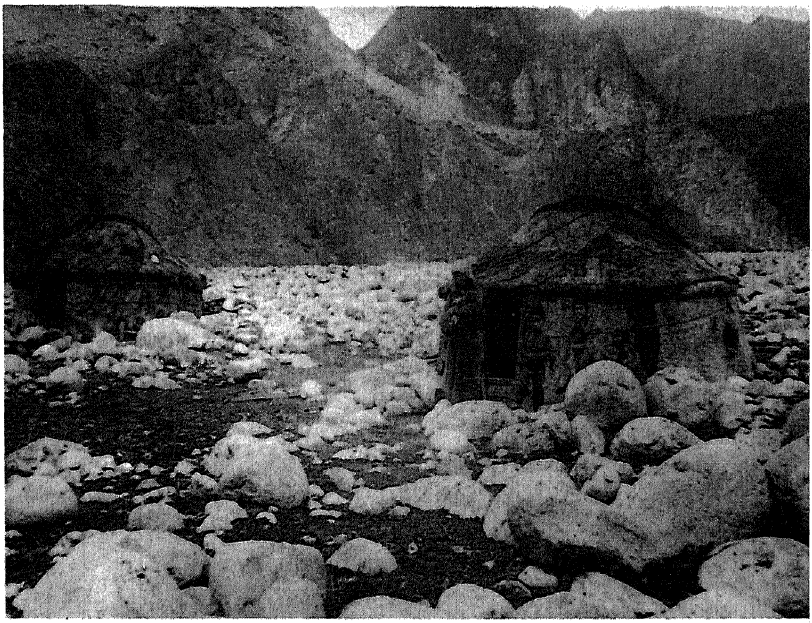
Five pairs of eyes swiveled toward the boy, who was now gazing upward with a beatific expression, a smile twitching at the corners of his mouth. His father looked very angry, but we laughed with the son, and he half-heartedly joined in.

This broke the ice, and our host became somewhat more cordial. He spoke a little Chinese, rather haltingly, and asked hopefully if I knew any Mongol or Manchu. He looked disappointed when I admitted that I did not know either, but he asked in Chinese if we would like some tea. I thanked him, and when he poured us some in the silver-lined bowls, I handed him some American cigarettes.

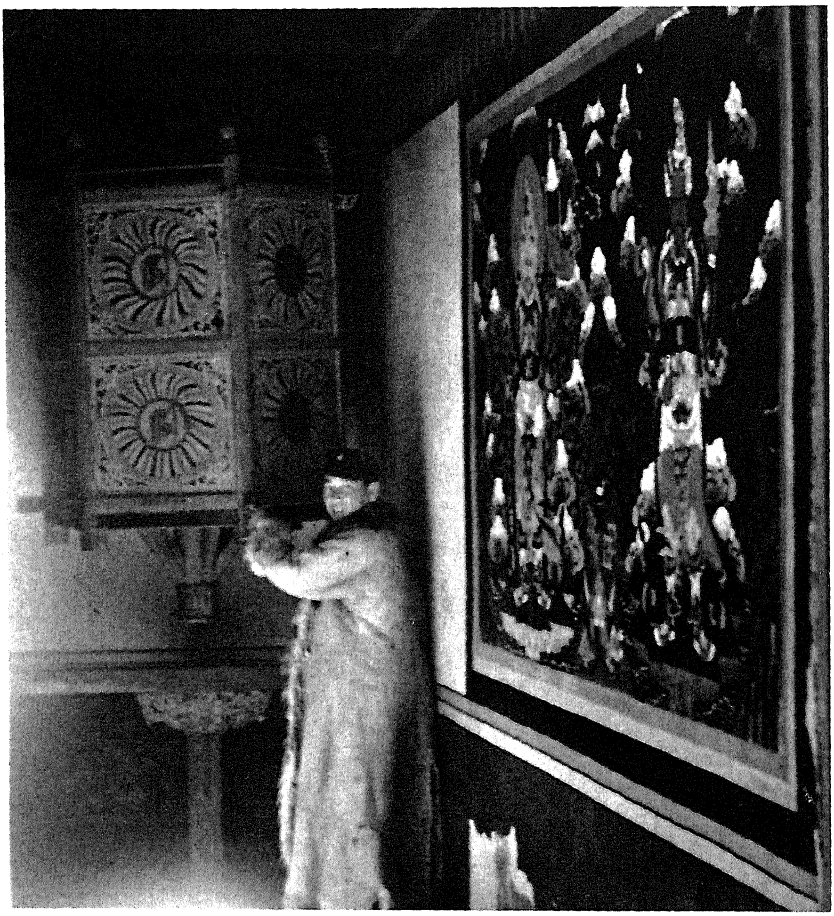
While he smoked, Fred casually began to do a few sleight-of-hand tricks, producing a series of silken scarfs from all over his body, and



Mongol woman milking goats.



Yurts in the wasteland, Beilighe Pass.
(*Photos by W. E. Hill.*)



Dunguerbo turning a giant prayer wheel in a lamasery.
(*Photo by W. E. Hill.*)

making them appear to change colors. Our host just stared at him with a dull, sullen expression; the performance appeared to leave him cold. Only his son seemed to be enjoying the magic, but his smile was a strange mixture of delight and scepticism and he made no comments.

Fred finally gave up trying to amuse them, and as I was not making any headway at conversation and we had seen all we wanted to of the yurt, we decided to push on.

As we rose to leave, the boy made the same disgusting noise with his little sack, and the father raised his hand to strike him. With an impish grin, the boy hopped over the threshold, but unluckily he landed with one foot in a tray of millet grain, set out to dry in the sun. This was apparently an especially grave sin, and his father was furious. Even while he bowed goodbye to us, he turned and glared at his son with a thunder-cloud expression. The latter just grinned back, from a safe distance across the brook.

I, for one, was rather disturbed by this first visit to a Mongol home. We had learned what the inside of a yurt looked like, but we had hardly been social successes. At this rate, I began to wonder if we could ever really get to know any Mongols, to find out how they lived, and what they thought.

9

MEETING DUNGUERBO

AS WE CLIMBED higher up the pass, I began to wonder if we had been wise in rejecting Farmer Li as an interpreter. Of course, in addition to his mercenary character, the fact that he was Chinese and not a Mongol counted against him. The Mongols probably would never feel entirely at their ease with him, and seeing them through his eyes, we might easily get a distorted picture of Mongol life. In spite of these obvious drawbacks, our first attempt to meet a Mongol family on our own had been rather futile, and at this rate it did not look as though we would make much headway. Before making any arrangements with him, however, I decided to see how we fared with one more family.

After a particularly steep stretch of trail we came to another alpine meadow, larger than the last, with three yurts and a one-room stone house making a small settlement. As we approached the first tent, a young Mongol in the khaki uniform of a Chinese student came out to meet us. When I introduced myself in Chinese, he answered in the same language, telling me his name was Dunguerbo. He was a quick and active-looking youngster and we immediately took a liking to him.

He said that he was a student from the Oirat School at Beilighe Temple, and had heard from a fellow classmate that we had been there recently while he was away. He was especially anxious to know if I had brought the "Master of the Secret Arts," and was delighted to meet Fred in person.

As we were talking, a much older man, also in khaki, came out of the same yurt followed by a large family of Mongols: two men, three women, and four or five children. The tent was a large one, yet it seemed impossible that it could have held so many people.

Dunguerbo introduced the older man as his father, Renchin Sumbur. He explained that their wartime home was near Shanpa, but his father was fond of hunting, and they had come up here to visit

this family, their relatives, and hunt mountain sheep. The father was a distinguished-looking man of about sixty—four times as old as his son—with a well-tanned face, iron grey hair, and a grizzled moustache. Although he was wearing the khaki uniform of a minor Chinese official, his broad features, like those of his son, left no doubt that he was Mongolian and not Chinese. In fact, he could not speak Chinese as well as Dunguerbo did.

The khaki garb of the two hunters looked very drab compared to the colorful costumes of their cousins. The three adult women were particularly well dressed. They were all wearing most of their head ornaments under bright-colored scarfs, and over their long, dark robes they had short sleeveless vests of brighter colored satin—rather old but still impressive.

After a rapid consultation in Mongolian with his father and one of the other men, Dunguerbo invited us to come into the largest yurt for tea. He seated us at the rear of the tent, in the place of honor, and sat next to us to act as our interpreter.

He was very much interested in our olive-drab caps, our G.I. shoes, and our woolen blankets. After inspecting everything in detail, he passed on the information to his relatives, who were taking no particular pains to curb their own curiosity. He explained that no foreigners had ever been up here, and although one or two of the men—like his father and himself—had seen Americans in the market place in Shanpa, this was their first opportunity to examine people of our race at close range. I replied, as tactfully as possible, that we felt the same way about the Mongols, and were anxious to know more about their customs.

For a moment Dunguerbo seemed slightly at a loss, as though he had not understood me correctly. Apparently he could not quite comprehend how we could take an interest in people and things he had always taken for granted. But he quickly entered into the spirit of the thing, and offered to take us on up the pass to another group of yurts near the top of the divide, so we could meet some other Mongol families.

He led us to the tent of an old metalsmith, who was repairing the handle of a lama bell over a tiny forge. As we came in, the smith dropped his work to stare at us. Dunguerbo explained that he was over seventy—a great age for a Mongol—and not having been spry enough to leave this mountain home for some years, had never seen

such strange people as us. We did not doubt his age. His face was shrunken into deep wrinkles and his hair was snow white, though his sharp eyes still gave him the alert expression of a younger man.

He was very friendly and asked us many questions, by way of Dunguerbo, while his wife heated some tea. Like most of the Mongols we met then and later, he had never even heard of America. Even Dunguerbo, who was rather well-educated by Mongol standards, did not seem to have any idea where it was. Later, when I found a secondhand Chinese atlas of the world, in Shanpa market, and presented it to him, he seemed very surprised to find that we lived across so much water. It seems that he had taken literally the expression *Barron Oross,* or "West Russians," that the Mongols use for all people of European stock, and had taken for granted that we came from the western end of the same continent.

In glancing around the metalsmith's yurt, I noticed a couple of antiquated muskets leaning against the back wall of the yurt, next to the shrine box. They were crude flintlocks, with most of the springs and other mechanism on the outside of the locks. Each gun had an attached prop made of two long, curved sticks, fastened near the end of the barrel, to serve as a rest when firing. I thought they were probably even older than their owner. The latter, noticing my curiosity about them, reached over and picked up one that he said was unloaded, and snapped the lock to show us the sparks.

Then, lest we of the other world still did not understand its mechanism, the old smith took out his flint-and-steel set and lighted some tinder to demonstrate that the guns operated on the same principle. The flint-and-steel set consisted of a small leather pouch containing chips of flint and dried shredded bark for tinder, with a strip of steel attached to its lower edge. He held a chip of flint with a piece of tinder pressed against it, in his left hand, and struck it a glancing blow with the steel edge of the case, held in his right. At the second strike a spark caught on the tinder, causing it to smoulder. He blew it until it flared up into a flame, and used it to light his pipe.

The flint-and-steel hung from the old man's tobacco bag along with a small bell-shaped object of white brass. I asked what the latter was for, and he patiently showed how it was used to knock the ashes from a pipe. Dunguerbo added that the Mongols did not like to knock out their pipes on the grate, as Chinese would do, because they considered the hearth, grate, and fire as sacred. I think the old

man must have felt we were pretty ignorant about the simpler things of life. But he seemed amused rather than disturbed, and when we rose to go, asked us to come back sometime.

We returned with Dunguerbo to his host's yurt. After some more conversation, and a few tricks by Fred, they gave us a substantial supper. This consisted of boiled dried mutton, which had been taken down from the rafters, to be eaten with the fingers, followed by a dish of mutton and noodles, to be eaten more elegantly with homemade chopsticks. Our host's brother rolled out the noodles before our eyes, and we saw why they almost invariably contain goat hairs. The board on which they are customarily prepared is very small, so some of the dough always slops over onto the felt flooring, where it picks up hairs and other foreign matter before it is retrieved.

Indeed, it requires a strong stomach to eat Mongol food, especially after you have seen your hosts use their tongues to clean the bowls you have just used, in preparation for the next guests. On this occasion we saw them do this to their own bowls, but we were still happily ignorant of the fact that they did it to the guest bowls as well. As soon as I found that out, I bought my own "grape-root" bowl, beautifully marked with a graining like bird's-eye maple, and carried it inside my shirt as the Mongols do, ready to produce it on any tea-drinking occasion.

While we were eating, Dunguerbo, on his own initiative, asked the family if we could sleep there, and the head of the family immediately agreed without question. We were very grateful, as we had only brought up one blanket apiece, for the sake of lightening our packs, and that would have been very inadequate covering for sleeping out at this altitude.

I could not help mentally contrasting the jovial friendliness and hospitality of this family with the surliness of the man in the first yurt we had visited. I casually asked who he was. Dunguerbo did not know, but asked the others. Somewhat coldly, our host told him that he was a man of the Hanggin Banner and they did not know or care what his name was; although he said that the man had married a Western Oirat woman, from their Banner, and had been a near neighbor for some time. Dunguerbo explained that the traditional lands of the Hanggin Banner were in the northern part of the Ordos, south of the River from here, and that his Banner and theirs had nothing in common. As for the man's Western Oirat wife, she had

automatically joined his Banner on marrying him, so they had no further interest in her.

We had many other occasions to note this lack of sympathy, even hostility, between people of the different Banners; though we found the feeling of antipathy strongest between the larger units, the tribes or leagues. Later, I discovered why this was.

It seems that the banners, tribes, and leagues were artificial divisions made during the last dynasty, when the Manchus ruled China. The Manchus gave their Mongol cousins many rights and privileges that they never permitted to their Chinese subjects, such as the right to intermarry with them. At the same time, they were anxious that the Mongols should never again become powerful enough to invade China. They remembered all too well that a comparatively small number of Mongols under Jenghis Khan, and his grandson Khubilai, had conquered and ruled China, and they did not want that to be repeated.

As a first move to restrain the Mongols, the Manchu emperors prevented them from wandering at will as they formerly had done, traveling around looking for better grazing lands. This was done by organizing them into banners under hereditary chieftains, usually given the title of "prince," and by giving each banner certain definite lands for grazing. If they left these to wander into the territory of another banner, they were severely punished.

Then, to keep the Mongols under firmer control, they organized them still further. First they grouped the banners into tribes, and later united the various tribes in areas with natural geographic boundaries into leagues. Each league was ruled by one of the tribal princes under the supervision of a Chinese (Manchu) military governor, who could crush any sign of revolt.

The two great divisions in Western Mongolia were the Ikh-chao League in the Ordos Desert, and the Ulan-chap League, north of the Hou-t'ao Plain. The Ikh-chao League was made up of only one tribe, consisting of seven banners, among which were the Ottok, Dalat, and Hanggin Banners; while the Ulan-chap League was composed of four tribes, one of which was the Oirat, further divided into three banners—the Eastern, Western, and Rear Oirat Banners. The Western Oirat Banner was hereditary ruler of the mountains north of Shanpa, as far as Paotou, and of that part of the Gobi immediately beyond. It was this banner that we came to know better

than the others, largely through our continuing friendship with Dunguerbo.

In view of this, the Hanggin neighbor not only belonged to another banner, but to a different tribe and league as well; and the distinctions were not wholly artificial ones. The different types of country, and the comparative isolation of the Ordos tribes, shut off by the Yellow River, had led to separate customs and traditions. It was not strange then that he was not accepted by the Oirats. But the fact that he was living in Oirat land at all showed how the old system had broken down as the Chinese immigrants drove independent-minded Mongols beyond their traditional banner lands.

I now realize that the man of Hanggin felt unsure of his position in spite of his wealth, and that he was expressing this in his open contempt at our ignorance of Mongol customs. These Oirats, on the other hand, were sure of themselves on their own lands and knew they had nothing to fear from us. So they felt free to be hospitable and to enjoy the novelty of our strangeness.

Their hospitality was almost embarrassing. After they had fed us, the family ate their own meals; the men eating first, then the women and children. After this, they took up their bedding, rolls of felt or heavy coats of fleece, and went outside to curl up on the ground. The head of the family stayed behind to light a butter lamp before the household shrine: a brass cup with a wick floating in half-melted butter. Then he too went out, and after pulling a loose felt across the smokehole to keep the heat in the yurt, left us to ourselves.

We were wakened shortly before dawn by the family kitten. He had scrambled in through a gap in the framework under a loose felt, and proceeded to snuggle up against each of us in turn, looking for warmth. Already we heard sounds of activity outside the tent, as two of the women rounded up the goats for the early morning milking. They had been brought down from the hill above while we were eating, the night before, but some had already managed to straggle away. We were surprised at the size of the herd and the differences in coat and in coloring. Some of the goats were short-haired, many were Angora, and some had fine curling wool almost like a sheep's. They ranged in color from black and white to a handsome blue-grey.

The leader of the herd especially amused us. An old buck with massive horns, and a long Angora coat, he strode primly around with

a felt apron hanging from his belly. We found that this was a form of birth control, to keep him from wasting his energies and to space the kids so that they would not all be born at one time, making too much work for the herdsmen.

The family gave us a hearty breakfast of buttered tea and goat cheese, and asked us more questions. After we had eaten our fill, we held a council of war, to decide whether to keep on through the pass to see the Gobi on the other side, or to return to camp. If we had known then what we discovered later—that the Gobi formed a high plateau, just a little below the peaks on the far side—we would have pushed on. As it was, we assumed that the mountains formed a wall between our plain and the desert, and we did not relish a long descent and another back-breaking climb like yesterday's; we were in no condition for it. Gathering storm clouds at the head of the pass and a raw, cold wind made our decision to return an easier one.

We passed out presents: needles and silk thread to the women, a jackknife and an unused can of Sterno to our host and, thanking Dunguerbo for his help in giving us such a good time, left for camp. The descent was much faster. We reached Beilighe Temple soon after noon, in the first of a series of rain squalls. Rather relieved to be facing the storm down here instead of up in the mountains, we mounted our horses for the return trip and reached camp before dark.

10

THE LIVING BUDDHA OF SHANDAGU

FOR THE TIME being, the climb up the pass had satisfied my curiosity about Mongol tent life, so I decided on another temple trip. I thought I would head for Shandagu Temple, having had it recommended to me by General Fu the first time I met him. After discussing the business that had brought me, we had had a personal chat and I happened to mention my interest in Lamaism. A flicker of disgust passed over his face—he is known for his hatred of the Mongols and their religion, but I had momentarily forgotten that—then he smiled, and as a model host made an effort to be helpful.

"In that case," he said, "you should certainly visit Shandagu Miao. Not only is it the largest of the lamaseries in this region, but they have a great Living Buddha there, the reincarnation of a lama saint, and spiritual ruler of all the local Mongols."

Up till now I had been unable to make so long a trip, but there was no longer any special reason for staying in camp. I decided to take with me a Protestant chaplain who was visiting the camp on a tour of U.S. outposts and, like us, was stranded while waiting for further orders. He had been wanting to see a lama temple because of his interest in comparative religions.

After lunch on Sunday, we left camp on horseback, with Hui as our ma-fu, and rode across country to Manhui. It had been raining heavily for several days—a rare thing in that arid land—and the irrigation ditches were flooding over into the fields. It was hard going for our little Mongol ponies, and we ourselves got badly splashed in fording the swollen creeks. To make matters worse, the change of wind that had cleared the weather blew out of the Northwest, from Outer Mongolia and Siberia, bringing icy gusts that might as well have come direct from the Arctic. It seemed hard to remember that it was still August.

At Manhui, Father Schram cordially welcomed us to spend the night. He was much interested to hear that we were bound

for Shandagu to see the Living Buddha, and when we sat down to a fine European dinner, he told us about other lama dignitaries he had known while he was stationed at Kumbum, in Kokonor.

During dessert, the chaplain asked him, "Just what is a 'Living Buddha'?"

"That's quite a question!" exclaimed Father Schram.

"When the Tibetans converted the Mongols to Lamaism, about three centuries ago," he began, "the Mongols wanted some holy men to match the Dalai Lama and the other great Reincarnations of Tibet. To oblige them, their Tibetan teachers 'discovered' that the souls of several Tibetan saints, long since dead, had found new homes in the bodies of various Mongol lamas. The other lamas told everyone that these newly revived saints had great powers of foreknowledge and healing. Their princes paid them special honors, and whole lamaseries grew up around them. The common people had such awe of them that they began to call them 'Living Buddhas'.

"Whenever one of these 'Living Buddhas' died, the lamas of his temple began looking for children who had been born on the day of his death. If they found one who could recognize some of the things that had belonged to the dead saint, they announced that he was the new bodily home of the saint's soul, and brought him back in pomp to fill the empty throne.

"You understand—while still so young—the boy would be in the care of a tutor and a regent. But meanwhile, he would be no less holy.

"The present Living Buddha of Shandagu is still in this stage," Father Schram continued. "He was only 'discovered' about ten years ago, when he was already a child of two or three years. Then, it was a tremendous honor to be the Living Buddha of Shandagu, but now the monastery has seen evil days."

"What's happened to the place?" asked the chaplain.

"You will see," said our host, and he stopped talking to light his long Dutch pipe.

We went on to discuss the implications of the Japanese surrender for the Chinese, and the confused state of local politics. Later in the evening, our host recalled our reason for being there, and sent for a Mongolian-Chinese neighbor named Ho, who knew the way to Shandagu Miao. Father Schram told us that Ho had formerly been a trader with the Outer Mongolians and knew the local Mongols

well. I was very pleased when he agreed to come along as our guide and interpreter.

We set out again next morning at dawn, riding toward the north. First we passed through a marginal farming area recently reclaimed by Chinese settlers. Then we struck out across wasteland which had been returned to grazing, after greedy farming methods had exhausted the soil for anything but coarse grass.

After two hours of rough riding we came to an upper loop of the Wu-chia Ho. The Chinese ferrymen were casually sitting in plain sight on the far bank. They stayed there for half an hour, eating a late breakfast and smoking their mutton-bone pipes. The chaplain, who was rather short-tempered, fumed at the delay. He had not been long in the Orient.

Soon after crossing the river we entered a section of true desert. Low dunes, covered with clumps of sagebrush, gave way to stretches of bare gravel and soft sand as we neared the mountains, until the vegetation vanished altogether in the ancient bed of the Yellow River. Hot winds as from a blast furnace rose from the sun-baked ground, as we skirted along the base of the range. It was certainly a contrast to the cold of yesterday. We felt oppressed by the heat and the sense of desolation.

Then suddenly we caught sight of a cluster of great white buildings, looming in the distance against the reddish mountains. They shimmered in the haze above the hot sand and seemed to be changing in shape. The nearer we got, the larger they became, though their outlines still wavered through the hot air. The haze seemed to move across our path of vision in waves driven by the hot breeze, so at moments we could almost see the buildings clearly; then their lines would dissolve, and once again they would be shapeless wavering masses. It seemed like the mirage of an enchanted city—certainly a fitting home for a great saint and a Prince of the Church.

We rode up a gradual slope of sand and gravel to the main buildings, which stood on a terrace at the base of the cliffs, and were met at the gate by the host monk, a stout, jovial Mongol in scarlet robes. He welcomed us, through Ho, then he led us into the guest courtyard and helped tether our horses before ushering us into a square building of Tibetan architecture at the rear.

Here, the host monk announced impressively, we were to be received in audience by the present Living Buddha of Shandagu, Tob-

dung Wanchuk, the Hambu Gegen, tenth reincarnation of the Tibetan poet-saint Milaraspa.

While digesting these high-sounding titles, relayed to us by Ho, we seated ourselves cross-legged on silken rugs, on a side dais below the empty throne. A lama attendant placed before each of us a small individual table of carved and gilded wood. Others brought us large wooden boxes of parched millet and cups of clarified butter. We were supposed to mix these with our tea, which they served us in silver-lined bowls of some richly-grained dark wood. The tea already had been made with milk or butter, but some Mongols like more; while the addition of parched millet makes it a fairly substantial food—more of a cereal than a drink. When we had each mixed a brew to our taste, we sat back and looked around us, admiring the magnificent furnishings of the room.

The throne itself was richly carved and gilded, and had the three cushions of yellow silk appropriate to Mongolian royalty. Above it hung a temple banner mounted in heavy brocade. This showed Tsong Kapa, the Reformer, surrounded by the nine former reincarnations that had preceded the present Living Buddha. The artist had so idealized them that it was impossible to guess what sort of men they had been. He had concentrated on painting the golden-yellow hats and capes that indicated their exalted position, and had made no attempt at actual portraiture.

On each side of the central banner hung six more Tibetan-style paintings, showing Milaraspa, the "first existence" of the Shandagu incarnations back in the 11th century. Each one had a central portrait of the poet-saint in a nonchalant pose as he invited inspiration. This was set against a mosaic of brightly colored scenes illustrating his life and poems. By means of all these paintings, the spirits of the Living Buddha's predecessors dominated the room. We could not help being impressed with the long tradition.

On a ledge below the large painting, I noticed several fading photos of the late Panchen Lama of Tibet, known to the Mongols, whom he visited in exile, as the "Banchin Bogdo." They still look upon him as the Living God, though *his* reincarnation has not yet been officially acknowledged by the Tibetans. The host monk was delighted when I recognized the subject, and asked if I had ever met him. Even though I admitted that I had not, he became even more friendly.

On both sides of the photographs, the monks had set out some of the gifts presented by previous visitors to the spiritual lords of Shandagu. Among them we saw foreign clocks, rare vases full of fading artificial flowers (the Mongols seldom saw real ones), a jade-studded scepter in a glass case, and some teacups and bowls of delicate china.

At sight of all these, we hesitated to offer our own meager gifts; a roll of silk (Japanese, from Shanpa market), a small porcelain figure of the Buddha of Wisdom that I had brought from Chungking, and some hard candies wrapped in cellophane. We had included the latter at the last minute, when Father Schram told us that the Living Buddha was still just a boy. Knowing the mercenary reputation of the lamas, I wondered if they had deliberately set out the former offerings in order to shame guests into giving more.

Our random gazing was suddenly interrupted by a flurry of maroon and crimson robes, as a new group of inquisitive monks arrived. They gathered around us, firing questions at us through Ho. Some of these newcomers could speak a little Chinese, and when they found I could too, they spoke to me directly. Everyone seemed to be talking at once; we must have sounded like a flock of magpies. Many of the monks could never have seen a foreigner, as they were very curious about us. Our cameras puzzled them, and our strange clothes interested them, but our features amused them very much.

Suddenly the chattering stopped, and the monks stepped reverently aside. Tobdung Wanchuk, the Living Buddha, carrying a black and white Pekinese under his arm, was entering with his guardian.

He was a short, slender, rather vapid-looking boy, of about twelve. He was bareheaded, but wore a splendid vest of scarlet and gold brocade, with an outer shawl and skirt of crimson serge, and a pair of handsomely worked Tartar boots with upturned toes. His dress rather than his manner marked him as a prince of the Church.

When he had seated himself informally on a cushion below the throne, with his little dog lying beside him, we presented our gifts, asking Ho to tell him in Mongolian how pleased we were to meet him. The Living Buddha just stared at us with an empty expression and made no reply.

While his guardian and the other monks politely praised the small Buddha figure, that to them was particularly valuable because of the

rarity of porcelain in Mongolia, the boy picked up some of the candies. With a half smile on his dull face, he held them up to the light to examine their bright colors. The crackle of the cellophane wrappings seemed to delight him especially. We felt sorry for him. Even if he were more intelligent than he looked, he was still little more than a child. We hated to think of him being doomed to spend a life of ceremonial, and ritual appearances, without any opportunity for games or normal companionship with children of his own age.

When the audience—such as it was—was done, the Living Buddha came down from his dais, and was escorted out by several attendants to prepare for services in the main temple. We followed more leisurely, with some of the Chinese-speaking monks. Meanwhile Ho, having duly introduced us, felt that his job was done and went to visit a friend in another building.

The main temple had the same general appearance from the outside as the one at Beilighe Miao, but was much larger, and more elaborately decorated. The walls were whitewashed, and severely plain except for the dark red strip around the top, which in this case was set with circular ornaments of real gold. The building stood on a terrace, faced in stone, with stone steps leading up to the recessed porch. At each side of the porch, small doors opened out into the "drum room"—corresponding to the belfry of a Christian church—and the stairway leading to the roof.

Flanking the great central doorway, huge frescoes of the Four Heavenly Kings were brilliantly painted in red and yellow, blue and green, with details in gold, making a fitting transition to the color-rich interior.

We entered the building to find a large main hall, lined with pillars of bright red lacquer. The four central columns were larger than the rest and had gilded dragons, with protruding red tongues, coiled around them. They rose to the four corners of a well in the roof that admitted light to the windowless interior. From the ceiling between two of these central columns hung the temple's nameboard. Its Chinese name Ch'eng-hua Ssŭ, "Monastery of the Completed Reincarnation," referred to its Living Buddhas; but the Tibetan name, Gundul Ling, was by far the richest-sounding. Pronounced in a deep bass voice by Tobdung Wanchuk's aged tutor, it sounded like the rumble of distant thunder.

As we strolled around, examining the fine brocade-mounted paintings on the walls, the Living Buddha entered with his attendants. He walked rather proudly under an enormously tall, broad hat of yellow silk, like those worn by his predecessors in the painting on the wall in the throne room. For the first time, he had an almost regal look. Ascending another gilded throne, at the far end of the hall, where we might have expected to see an altar, he seated himself cross-legged on the yellow cushions and nonchalantly picked up his bell and *dorje* scepter, to preside over the service in the double role of officiant and chief god.

Meanwhile the other lamas filed in, taking their seats on the long prayer benches that extended the length of the hall. As they sat, they faced each other across the center aisle. Each had his tea bowl, which was constantly being refilled by boy attendants who walked up and down the aisle carrying huge jugs, as well as a sheaf of pages from their holy scriptures, in Tibetan. One of the monks confided to me that they could only read the sounds of this foreign writing, and could not understand the words. But they still thought they got merit by reading them.

The older monks chanted while the younger ones kept up a weird and at first not unpleasing, din with several types of musical instruments. Some brayed on conch shells or on small trumpets of brass shaped like dragons. Others burst their lungs over two much larger telescopic horns of copper trimmed in silver, that extended fully twelve feet in length. Still others piped on whining flageolets, or blew shrill wooden whistles, while an undercurrent clashing of cymbals and the booming of heavy drums maintained the rhythm, accented by sharper sounds from the skull rattles and hand bells. As a masterpiece of ingenuity, one young lama had rigged up seven of the hand bells on a wooden frame suspended from the rafters, so that he could ring them all simultaneously, producing a sharp clash with every tug on the long cord. Altogether, the noise was deafening and we wondered how the boy-god's ears could stand it.

Before the concentrated noise drove us out, we went on into the sanctuary, behind the Living Buddha's throne, through a door at the end of the hall. Here we found a great altar with a large gilded Buddha and a slightly smaller figure of Tsong Kapa, with their respective disciples. Behind these two sets of images stood lesser

ones, placed in niches of artificial rockery, forming a sort of reredos. The rich gilding on the figures of saints and goddesses gleamed impressively from the shadows of the blue-painted grottoes; while the dark figures of the demon-gods at the sides blended with the background. We scarcely saw more than their crowns of skulls and blood-dripping tongues. The chaplain, never having seen a lama temple before, was amazed at the way the sublime and the horrible were so grotesquely blended.

Coming out of the sanctuary, we noticed a low table at one side of the main hall, which was set for the Lamaist "communion service." In the middle of this improvised altar stood a vase full of some sort of wine, with a sacred image lashed to the top of it. The other end of the cord used to bind the image was attached to a *dorje* scepter, to be held by the chief priest, and in front of the vase were several bowls of dough cakes that he would pass out to the communicants. Unfortunately, we were not able to see the actual ceremony—rarely, if ever, seen by foreigners. It would have been especially interesting for the chaplain, since it had obviously been copied from some earlier Christian rite, probably of the Nestorian Church.

We returned to the front of the building and climbed the steep flight of rickety stairs to the second story, which consisted of a hollow square of structures around an open court. A line of small, shedlike meditation rooms extended down each side. In the middle of the court a small, square structure that looked like a pagoda stood over the well in the ceiling of the prayer hall. The lattice windows on its four sides were now swung open to let in light below.

We glanced down on the service. From here it was slightly easier on our eardrums. The little Living Buddha still dominated the scene in his brilliant robes, which stood out from the shadows in the rear of the hall. But he looked rather pathetic, smaller than ever under his great ceremonial hat. He was idly leafing through the book set before him, with a dazed and unhappy look. At the moment he was taking no real part, except as an object of adoration.

Resuming our explorations, we examined a tall structure across the back of the court. It was in two stories. The lower section was an upward extension of the sanctuary, and was faced with lattice windows to let in light on the images. Our guide said that the room above it, was a chapel for the Living Buddha, apparently a "holy of holies," as he refused to open it for us.

Shandagu Miao at the base of the mountains. Author in foreground.
(*Photo by W. S. LaSor.*)

Chortens at Shandagu Miao.
(Photo by W. S. LaSor.)

Yamantaka and other demon-gods.
(*Courtesy of the Newark Museum.*)

The Golden Image at Shandagu Miao.
(*Photo by W. S. LaSor.*)

Opposite this, at the front of the building, was another sanctuary, which we entered by a side doorway. It was rather dark inside, but our eyes gradually got accustomed to the lack of light. In the heavy, carved shrine cabinet over its altar we dimly glimpsed a large image of the temple's guardian, Yamantaka, "The Conqueror of Death." This demoniac figure, with his huge bull's head and thirty-six arms silhouetted against an aura of flames, was clasping his screaming consort to him in an embrace of rage and ecstasy. The chaplain shuddered.

I tried to explain that the physical union of god and goddess (or demon and demoness), so commonly shown in lama images, is intended to express an ancient Asiatic concept of the intimate relationship between the spiritual and material forces in the universe. As this interaction of forces is considered to be a very dynamic process, the lama artists usually represent the sacred couple, who symbolize it, in a state of ecstatic fury. But my companion was very literal-minded. He seemed unwilling to believe that the image could have any significance beyond what immediately met the eye, and was still disgusted.

From here we returned to quieter aspects of Lamaism in the smaller halls on the hillside above the main temple. These were dedicated to calm, resigned-looking Buddhas, and lush, full-breasted goddesses. Handsome Tibetan-style temple banners, set in rich borders of Chinese silks and brocades lined their walls. But I was struck by the lack of small bronze images, such as we could buy in Shanpa's market place. These are usually so common in lama shrines.

I remarked about this to one of the Chinese-speaking lamas, who was acting as opener of temples. He pointed down to the plain below the monastery, where an abandoned campsite of a hundred or more Quonset-hut-shaped adobe shacks straddled the road.

"Chinese soldiers," he said simply. Then he went on to explain, in a resigned but faintly bitter voice, how the provincial troops recently quartered there had looted almost everything that could be carried from most of the temples. He showed us how even their officers, living in some of the outer buildings of the monastery—in shrine halls as well as in dormitories—had defaced the clean compound walls with fine-sounding Nationalist slogans, and had reduced the buildings themselves to empty shells.

Now we understood what Father Schram had meant when he said that Shandagu had greatly changed.

Quartering troops in temples has been an accepted practice in modern China, where religion is taken lightly, and temples are considered as public property. But I had noticed in my travels that the inevitable destruction is always much worse in the Mongol and Tibetan temples of the frontier regions.

The border Chinese, despising the alien peoples they have so often dispossessed, seem to take pleasure in wanton breakage and looting at these temples. The very fact that the shrines are reverenced to an extent they fail to understand, and still play an important part in the life of the "barbarians," seems to bring out their worst instincts.

Later we passed a gutted temple building as we were walking with one of the lamasery officials on the way to visit his private quarters. "Chinese soldiers!" he muttered, with a shrug of his shoulders. This time the words had a deeper emphasis. He explained, however, that in spite of these depredations by the border troops, and in spite of a Japanese attempt to win them over by the present of a fine German police dog to the Living Buddha, the monks of Shandagu had remained loyal to Governor Fu and the Chinese Government, throughout the War. They felt that the only hope for the Mongols was to stay on good terms with the Chinese, though that often meant humiliations. They had no real choice.

The hospitable monks tried to persuade us to stay a day or two, but I had given my word that I would bring the chaplain back that day, and he had seen enough. We returned to Manhui for a very late lunch with Father Schram, and by hard riding, reached camp at sunset.

* * *

Some weeks later I stopped again at Shandagu on a trip up the range further north. This time I had with me two young radiomen from the camp, Don Lund and Roswell Hull.

We started early, and made the trip in one day, but we delayed too long at Father Schram's, over a good lunch. The sun was setting behind the mountains as we crossed the desert beyond the Wu-chia River, and it was pitch-dark when we rode through the temple gate.

We saw no lights and the place seemed deserted. But as we entered the courtyard of the guest compound, an unshaven lama in

a ragged robe came out of the kitchen at the side. He eyed us suspiciously, as though to say, respectable people don't travel at night in this region where every Chinese farmer is a potential bandit. With rather bad grace he led us into a rather shabby guest room—apparently all that he felt we deserved.

He told us that the Living Buddha, and the Second Grand Lama were away, along with most of the rest of the monks, and that the abbot had not yet returned from Kumbum. The monastery was almost deserted. Later he brought in an equally shabby, equally shifty-looking old lama, whom he introduced as the "Assistant Second Grand Lama," to receive the presents I had brought for the chief dignitary there. Neither was at all cordial—either then or next morning—and before leaving, my companions only got in to see the main hall. Instead of the large number of monks the chaplain and I had seen, there were only four or five, mournfully intoning the scriptures (without music!). They seemed lost in the vastness of the place.

While we were heating some cans of rations to supplement our temple breakfast, a young Mongol drifted in to watch the strange doings of the foreigners. He knew Chinese rather well and we got talking. He said that he belonged to the Dalat Banner, and I was surprised to find that Shandagu was a Dalat temple, though built on the edge of the Oirat territory. He said that the Living Buddha was not far away, staying at his mother's camp in a nearby valley. I asked the young Dalat if he would guide us there and he said he would be glad to. He was still curious about these "foreign devils" and wanted to see more of us.

Riding back along the range for about a mile, we came to a deep, narrow gorge and turned up it. Around the second bend, we found a small strip of raised ground, above the bed of the stream, which was now dry. On this were three small and rather dirty Mongol tents, with a flock of goats grazing on the slope above them. It looked like any other Mongol camp, but our guide insisted it was the Living Buddha's. We were rather disappointed, to say the least, having imagined that the tent of a Living Buddha would be something of a spectacle.

We dismounted, tethered our horses to a forked stick, and while some children sat on the fierce dogs to silence them, we entered the central tent. At the back sat the Living Buddha's old tutor, with a sheaf of scripture pages on his lap, while his exalted pupil sat below

him. We seemed to have interrupted some long-winded theological explanation. Both looked up curiously as we entered. The old man, setting down his book, half rose to offer me the seat of honor beside him. Meanwhile a small attendant scurried out for some tea and cheese.

I bowed to each, presenting them with a blue silk scarf, called *katagh,* which I had just belatedly learned from Dunguerbo was the Mongolian equivalent of a calling card, and had to be presented on every visit. Then I gave a small package of gifts from the three of us to the Living Buddha.

I was agreeably surprised to find that our first impression of the latter had been false. The little Living Buddha proved quick and intelligent. He took special interest in the possibilities of a magnet we had given him among our presents, and quickly learned all that could be done with it. In his plain gray robe with a twisted purple cloth for a belt, and well-worn boots, he looked like any ordinary Mongol youth from a family of moderate means.

He spoke freely to me in rather good Chinese, though he had not even admitted knowing that language on my previous visit. He was always very respectful to his tutor, and to us as his guests, when I was speaking to him directly. But when we three Americans talked together, or took time out to drink tea, he laughed and joked at our expense with his little brothers, who ran in and out of the tent, giggling shyly.

We were amused to see his expression when he smiled. His very natural grin seemed to accentuate the sharp angle of his chin, and this, with his pointed ears, made him look like an elf or imp of mischief. I concluded that his apparent dullness on the previous visit had been largely due to shyness. Perhaps he felt ridiculous at dressing with such pomp to preside over a half-looted monastery, or else he was just bored at having to dress up formally to receive a couple of stupid foreigners. At any rate, he was a very human person.

As we rode away again, after receiving farewell katagh scarfs and a present of cheese for our journey, we decided that this interlude away from the temple must have been like a summer vacation for the boy-god, even if he had to spend part of it at his books. We hoped for his sake that he could enjoy it as long as possible, before returning to the soul-crushing pomp of Shandagu Temple.

11

CH'IEN-LI TEMPLE, PRIDE OF THE OIRATS

FROM the Living Buddha's camp we rode north again, following the range. Our goal was Ch'ien-li Miao, thirty miles further up the range, northwest of the town of Wuyuan. Father Schram had said that this was one of the great temples of the Oirat Banner and well worth seeing. It would have been more logical to go there with an Oirat like Dunguerbo, but the intervening territory was mostly Dalat, and the Dalat youth who had led us to the Living Buddha's camp said he knew it well, so we decided to keep him as our guide.

All day long we rode; sometimes along cart tracks, sometimes across bleak patches of desert where the trail was so faint we frequently lost it. In the afternoon we wasted a lot of time in a wide detour around a long stretch of swampland that skirted a narrow lagoon, a northern arm of the Wu-chia River.

On the edge of the swamp, where the land was drier, we passed a few farms. We also passed a number of bare, dust-bowl patches, with all the topsoil gone, beside abandoned huts of crumbling adobe. Many people must have tried, and failed, to make a living by frontier farming. Agriculture here is a precarious experiment, at best.

At one farm, belonging to an aunt of our guide, we saw two Mongol women, wives of his cousins, helping to thresh grain with long, primitive flails. We were surprised to see them wearing the characteristic Ordos headdress of the Dalats with coral-studded braids, instead of the Oirat swiks. In fact, we came across several homesteads of Dalats, where the Mongols were growing millet as a sideline to raising their herds of sheep and goats. It seemed strange to see a people we had always thought of as nomad herdsmen settling down as farmers. Our guide said it was a recent development of the last few years. After the Chinese had taken away all their best grazing land for farming, these Mongols had to settle down in order to make a living.

In spite of what he said, I concluded that even in the past, when they had vast grazing lands, there were always a few Mongols who preferred to settle down and farm, at least during the summer season. About half a mile west of Shandagu Temple, at the base of the mountains, we had passed the ruins of a small settlement consisting of three or four stone houses, and the foundations of several yurts, almost obliterated by drifting sand. Around these were scattered fourteen large stone rollers of a type formerly used for grinding grain. The houses were all arranged like yurts, with hearth holes in the center of the single, large room, and flat floors. Chinese farmers would have had a raised dais or k'ang at one end, for sleeping, and modern Mongols probably would also. This was obviously an old Mongol community, yet the fact that the houses were of stone suggested a settled life, while the grinding stones indicated a farming economy. It must have been very old, as the desert has long since swallowed up all the fertile land nearby, and the nearest tract under cultivation was some miles away, across the Wu-chia River.

The people in the farms we passed had absolutely no idea of distance. They always made some answer to our questions about how far we had still to ride to reach the temple, but the distance would shrink or increase by tens of *li,* depending on the imagination of farmers, none of whom seemed ever to have been there. The ride was long and the sandy trail reflected the glare of the sun to tire our eyes.

The swampland seemed refreshingly cool after the open desert, but it, too, seemed endless. When we finally passed beyond it, we saw in the distance a sizable town at the mouth of a pass, and as the sun was setting, we looked forward to finding a place to spend the night there. We urged our tiring horses on to make it before dark, in order to be received as respectable travelers, and not be suspected of being potential bandits.

Our haste was futile. When we reached it, we found the town in ruins. It had obviously borne the full brunt of a battle between the local people and the Japanese, in one of the invaders' efforts to capture the Hou-t'ao region from the north. Scarcely a house was left standing, and the walls of what had been large compounds were breached as if by artillery. Small blockhouses stood on all the surrounding hills, but these had apparently been ineffective against a

surprise attack in force. It was a terrible sight in the twilight, and for the first time we were impressed with the nearness of the war. Though the Japanese had even conquered Shanpa once, all the damage had long since been repaired, and this was our first sight of large-scale ruins in this region.

Beyond the shattered town, the country got even bleaker. We did not even see the fire of a yurt, and it was getting dark rapidly. Furthermore, the Mongol boy could not remember which gorge led up to the lamasery, and they all looked alike in the deepening dusk. We finally decided to stop for the night on the slope at the foot of the mountains, even though we could not find water, or shelter from the wind, or any of the other requirements for a good campsite.

The Mongol boy and our Chinese ma-fu unsaddled the horses while we spread our blankets and got the cooking fire started. It was a completely god-forsaken spot, with a cold wind roaring down the mountain side and no trace of life in any direction.

In the middle of the night I suddenly woke out of a sound sleep. A blood-curdling scream cut the air from the mountainside above us. It sounded as though all the malignant banshees in the Ould Country were crying out at once in one agonized shriek of despair. I sat bolt upright and felt the hair on my scalp tingle. One more shriek ended in a death gargle, and a dull sound of heavy wings striking the ground as some huge bird of prey renewed its grip on a victim. Then silence as before, and the chill air was now colder with the presence of Death. I shuddered, and crawled deeper into my blankets, wondering what sort of animal had died on the mountain.

When next I woke, the mountainside behind us was bathed in the glow of a gold and crimson dawn, and though the landscape was as bleak as ever, we all felt our spirits much refreshed. After a light breakfast, we saddled up again, and continued on, only to find a sizable river emerging from a gorge about a quarter of a mile beyond. Several yurts were set out beside the river bed, around a turn in the gorge, and once again I was impressed by the fact that no matter how bleak and uninhabited this Mongolian country appeared, there were always people somewhere nearby, living in the most unlikely places.

Not far beyond, on the cliff tops, stood the piles of stones known as öbös, which mark the sites of the larger monasteries. We knew we must have reached our goal.

In a mood of eager anticipation, we rode up the twisting gorge below the öbös, and climbed a steep side path to the plateau atop the cliffs. Would the pride of the Western Oirats be all that we had heard it was? Our first view of the lamasery, with its huge main temple, and seven others only a little smaller, was anything but a disappointment. The buildings were probably not much larger than those at Shandagu, but the sudden approach seemed to give them an added grandeur. The main temple seemed particularly striking, with its ornate Chinese-style roofs spreading in graceful sweeps over the two-story, fortress-like structure of severely plain Tibetan architecture.

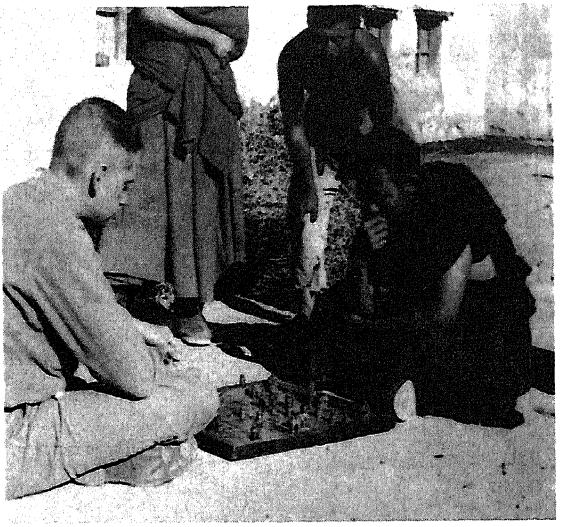
When we had stopped for lunch at Father Schram's on our way to Shandagu, two days ago, Ho had told us that this was one lamasery that had never been looted by the Chinese, and from such an impressive exterior, we expected much inside. But our hopes were dashed as we passed the first large compound and looking in, saw on the rear wall, the bold signboard-type characters which are painted up wherever the Chinese soldiers establish their barracks. These well-written injunctions to Loyalty and Benevolence and Respect, together with the other Nationalist virtues, always seemed ironic to us in this region. They were especially so on lamasery walls where the unrestrained actions of the border soldiery, and their inevitable looting, were scarcely calculated to inspire loyalty toward the Chinese.

We dismounted in a clearing, and tied our reins to some forked tree trunks, the usual form of Mongol hitching post. No one seemed to have the curiosity to come out to see us. We wandered around looking at the outsides of the buildings, until the Dalat youth found a lama and explained to him that we were foreigners from Shanpa who wanted to visit the temple.

The latter called out some other lamas, and they took us into a beautifully appointed small guest room. It was lavishly painted with Chinese motives, and yet so completely overdecorated that it obviously had never been built for Chinese. Here they seated us on three cushioned thrones while waiting for the abbot, and brought us tea and cheese and millet.

When the abbot finally came in, we were much impressed by him. He was a very old man, with white hair which increased the dark complexion of his deeply wrinkled face so that it seemed like old leather. His eyes were shrewd, and his large aquiline nose reminded

Main pieces from two Mongolian chess sets.
(*Photos by Carl Schuster.*)



Playing Mongolian Chess.
(Photo by W. E. Hill.)

Peacock pawns and rabbit pawns from two Mongolian chess sets.
(Photos by Carl Schuster.)

us of an American Indian's. At first he was reserved, as are most Mongols until they know who you are, or why you have come to see them. But he thawed completely when I talked to one of his attendants who spoke Chinese, and was able to supplement what had apparently been a most inadequate introduction on the part of the young Dalat.

The abbot's attendant made himself responsible for us all day, acting as guide to the temples and as host in our rooms, serving us the meals and seeing that we were well fed. He was something of a mystery. It was a surprise to find a Mongol who was literate in his own language and in Chinese as well—he could read and write both—and who could speak Chinese without that rather thick accent which tends to carry over from Mongolian. Furthermore, he was dressed in yellow satin, a fabric more appropriate to a royal layman than to a lama. Our Mongol interpreter spoke of him as "Min' Wang," "Prince Ming," until the man in question took him aside and said something to him privately. He called himself "Jimba," a Tibetan name appropriate for a lama, and as though to prove that he really was a monk, he appeared next morning in lama robes. However, they were of somewhat richer material and finer cut than those of the others, so we were not entirely convinced.

Some of the lesser Mongol princes had dealt with the Japs at the beginning of the War, preferring to risk trusting the Japanese promises of autonomy rather than continue to suffer impositions and even robbery at the hands of the border Chinese. However, they later found themselves in an impossible situation, when the Japanese economic exploitation proved equally intolerable, without providing any compensations. Such people had to hide from both sides, and what would be a better sanctuary than a remote monastery?

Probably the true explanation for Jimba and his presence here was a more matter-of-fact one. He could have been both a prince by blood and a lama. Every Mongol family—regardless of rank—must give at least one son to the Church, and in the division of labor within a monastery a noble youth would be likely to be chosen as host monk because his early training would have given him greater courtesy.

When the abbot had left, Jimba took us out to show us the various temple buildings. The rich magnificence of the main hall showed little evidence of looting, and the pride of the sanctuary, a large golden

plan of the Universe, or *mandala,* had somehow managed to escape the keen eyes of the soldiers, probably because it was partly hidden under a screen of faded parchment.

Two of the lesser halls, and a giant prayer-wheel in a building of its own, had a series of paintings showing the life of Marpa, one of the greatest Tibetan teachers before Tsong Kapa. The reason for this emphasis was apparently that the Living Buddha of Ch'ien-li, the Boyin Hutukhtu, was considered as his reincarnation. The pictures emphasized the saint's miraculous life and his strange visions. The climax seemed to be the time when he chopped off his own head with a sword, and from the hole in his neck there spurted out a pyrotechnic display of Buddhist deities. It must be a difficult thing for a Living Buddha to maintain the tradition of this human Roman candle!

In the course of the day we met the current Living Buddha, a determined-looking little boy of seven, with a firm mouth and set chin, and a self-assured look in his dark eyes. The other monks were very proud of him, pointing out that he was a Great Incarnation, instead of a minor one, like the Living Buddha of Shandagu. We could see that though the monks moved back and forth freely between the two monasteries, there was considerable rivalry between the two places. No doubt it sprang partly from tribal politics, since these monks belonged to the West Banner of the Oirats, and were rather contemptuous of the Dalats, who had gone so far in abandoning their old ways of life as to conform to the customs of the Chinese.

Ho had told us that Ch'ien-li Temple formerly had had two Living Buddhas, both important incarnations. The jealousy between them was intense, and each had ultimately retired to one half of the monastery, which was divided into two sections by a small gully. Not only was the whole monastery torn by their intrigues, but it was an expensive proposition maintaining two princes of the Church in the style to which they were accustomed. The problem was finally settled many years ago by a wise abbot. One of the incarnations died, and the abbot saw to it that they could never locate the body into which his soul had been reborn, so he was quietly forgotten. His half of the monastery decreased in importance and was ultimately abandoned to crumble into ruins—ruins much older than those made by the Chinese provincial troops in the outbuildings of the part still standing.

This is a good instance to show the actual status of the Living Buddhas in Mongol social and religious life. While the sanctity of the Living Buddhas is constantly emphasized by the lamas, to heighten the prestige of individual lamaseries, or of the Church as a whole, the reverence for them is not enough to prevent the removal of a Living Buddha when political expediency requires it. In short, the political importance of a Living Buddha seems to far outweigh the spiritual, in the eyes of the material-minded leaders of the Church, although they are canny enough not to let the laymen become too aware of this. Thus, the average Mongol received in audience by a Living Buddha still feels a sense of awe, as though he were in the presence of a god himself.

That night we were served a royal feast. The main course consisted of a whole sheep, a present from the Living Buddha. This was an especially great honor, considering that, for these people, a sheep represents portable wealth, more valuable as a constant source of wool than for its meat. Luckily, one of the attendants stepped up to do the carving for me, so that I did not have to stumble through the elaborate ritual of dismemberment, which I had only heard described and had never been forced to attempt. We ate the rich, well-cooked meat with our fingers, cutting off pieces with silver-mounted sheath-knives they had provided for us, until we were gorged. Then our hosts brought on bowls and chopsticks, and set before us a huge plate of well-seasoned noodles, made with the delicacies of the sheep.

As we sat, soddenly full, on the k'ang after dinner, I fell into a long conversation with the host monk about Mongol customs. In the course of it, I asked him if the Mongols had any games, meaning indoor ones, as opposed to their ceremonial horse races and wrestling matches.

"We have *shatara*. That is to say, 'horse-chess,'" he explained to me in Chinese.

"Is that anything like what the Chinese call 'elephant chess'?" I continued.

"No," he replied. "The Chinese have nothing like it."

I felt much relieved. Chinese chess has always looked to me like a very dull game. It is played with inscribed counters on a maplike board, according to complicated rules which make it entirely different from chess as we know it.

Our host tried to change the subject—it seemed to embarrass him—but I persisted, and asked to see a set.

He turned and mumbled something in Mongolian to one of the young lamas who was clearing away the remains of our evening feast, and the latter hurried out. While we waited, Jimba explained to me that the Chinese merchants and settlers in Inner Mongolia laughed at the Mongols for playing a foreign and barbaric game, that is, different from anything they had; so they only played it among themselves, and did not usually let visitors see it. However, since we were his guests and had come from a far country, he felt obliged to humor my request.

In a few minutes the young lama came back with a red-lacquered box, and a large wooden board. He placed them between us on the k'ang, where we were sitting cross-legged in Mongol fashion on a felt rug. Then he brought over a couple of butter lamps from the row before the shrine box in the corner, to light up the board, for it was already getting dark.

The board was about three feet square, painted white, with a raised edge in red. In the center, narrow black lines marked off the sixty-four squares. They were not checkered like those on our own chess boards, but were left white. While I was examining it, my host slid the top off the red box and removed a folded square of coarse native paper, ruled in lines like those on the wooden board.

"This is what we play on when we go traveling," he explained. "The large board would never fit well in a camel pack." Then he shook out the gaily painted chessmen, and began to arrange them at the ends of the board.

I was delighted at their appearance. They were carved from willow wood, then painted and varnished. The two sides were distinguished by the colors of the bases, one side red, the other green, colors which to the Mongols represent Good and Evil, Spiritual and Material, but there were also differences in the form of the pieces on each side.

The red "king" was a Mongol prince and the green one an old-time Chinese viceroy. Both were wearing colored robes and hats with peacock feather plumes, and were seated on cushioned thrones. Instead of queens, the Mongol had the sacred white lion of Tibetan Buddhist folklore beside him, while the Chinese had an evil tiger. Where we would have had bishops, this set had brown camels on

one side, and cream-colored ones on the other; where we would have had simply horses' heads to indicate the knights, it had the whole animals, fat mongol ponies; and in place of our castles or "rooks" it had the baggage carts of the two opposed rulers, complete with horses and grooms. In short, with horses, camels, and carts, as well as the supernatural animals to assist them, the armies of the two rulers were complete. In addition, the red side had a row of small Buddhist peacocks (celestial birds) as pawns, while the green side had a row of earthbound hens.

I had long since known of the old Asiatic idea of the great division of all things into two original elements; one of which was good, strong, and spiritual, the other, evil, weak, and material. But I did not expect to see it illustrated so graphically in a game. I did not have much time to think about it, though, for when I made the obvious remark that their game looked in principle very much like our European one, as opposed to Chinese "chess," our host immediately invited me to play with him.

His usually friendly face looked shrewd and sly in the glimmering light of the butter lamps, and I hesitated for a moment, thinking I would probably find him too sharp an opponent. One of the young lamas, who knew enough Chinese to understand the host's invitation to play, began to snicker. I gathered he was amused at the prospect of seeing a foreigner lose face while trying to play their ancient national game, so I decided to take the dare.

My opponent showed me how they made the moves—for the most part as we do—and we began to play. In addition to being unfamiliar with the uncheckered board and unusual pieces, I had another handicap. My host had two or three monks behind him who increased his natural ability by warning him of my likely plans and suggested stratagems to him. Sometimes they would even lean over and make a move for him, or retract a stupid one he had made. In a surprisingly short time my opponent said *"shāt!"* and then *"māt!"*, meaning, as they sounded, the same as our "check" and "mate."

My host sat back with a rather smug expression on his face and asked if I would like to play again.

We switched sides, and by this time, having gotten more used to the set, I did better, but eventually found myself with my viceroy standing alone against his prince and several other men.

My opponent sat back as before, when the first game was done. Once again he asked me if I would care to play some more. My face must have shown my bewilderment. He smiled and explained that, according to their custom, when a "king" stands alone no one has won the game.

"We do not take advantage of a lonely man," he said. What a fine gesture, I thought. Frankly, it surprised me. After having had several opponents ganging up on me, and after having seen my chief opponent retract poor moves after he had made them, I was not prepared for such sportsmanship.

Finally, in a third game, the unfamiliarity had largely worn off and I managed to beat him. When he started to leave, so we could turn in, he remarked how happy he was to find that our two civilizations had something in common.

"Everything else you 'West Russians' have seems so different!" he exclaimed.

Next morning, after a huge breakfast of dumplings made of the remains of the mutton chopped up with wild onion stalks, we decided to take some pictures of the Living Buddha. The lamas got out his robes, and the over-large "incarnation-hat." Apparently this boy was "discovered" fairly recently, and they had no small-sized hat for him. He sat upon his gilded throne, brought out of the throne-hall on to the temple porch for the occasion, with an expression of solemn dignity, very impressive but rather unnatural in a child so young. But as they lifted him down from the throne, he showed that he had a human side, too. His lama attendants had taken off his high leather boots so that they would not soil the rich, yellow silk cushions, and as his toes touched the cold stone of the porch floor he let out a shrill cry, and whined like any other spoiled seven-year-old until they put on his boots again.

Unlike the lad at Shandagu, he had his playmates, a couple of children his own age, who accompanied him everywhere, and romped around full of mischief. We remembered the shrewd, calculating look on the face of the old abbot, however, and knowing how much it would be to his interest to have a young, or at least a weak, "Living God," we feared for the boy's future.

Whatever the abbot's attitude in regard to the Living Buddha, he was very kind to me. As we prepared to leave the monastery, the host lama presented me with the box of chessmen, wrapped in a

ceremonial scarf. It was a gift from the abbot, he explained, in return for the presents I had given on arrival. There was nothing I would rather have had. Not only was the set interesting in itself, but I foresaw that knowledge of the game would give us even more prestige among the Mongols, especially if I could practice up on my own set between trips.

12

MORE LAMA PERSONALITIES

OUR return trip from Ch'ien-li Temple to Shandagu was much quicker, as we found a short cut along the lagoon, which took us through the middle of the swamp, avoiding the long detour. The small, flat-roofed huts rising from the marsh grasses on the far bank, silhouetted against a sea of moving reeds, struck chords in my memory. They reminded me immediately of the baymen's shacks along the creeks at home; but the birds we saw feeding on the mudbars or wading in the shallow water were vastly different from anything I had ever seen on Long Island. They were mostly reddish Asiatic geese and very tall Manchurian cranes, blue-grey with black heads and black-trimmed wings. Only a species of mallard looked at all familiar.

The huts along the water's edge seemed to belong primarily to fishermen, a surprising thing in this semidesert country. Some were dragging their nets in the main lagoon, while a number of them had walled off a side pond and, having drained it to get what fish it had, were letting in water from the main stream through a sluiceway filled with standing nets. A large colony of wild cormorants and a couple of graceful fish eagles were competing with the men, but there seemed to be a considerable number of dead fish that neither man nor bird cared about. The stench was frightful—one more thing to disturb our finicky horses. They were as glad as we were to leave that eerie swamp.

This time we arrived at Shandagu Temple just as the sun was setting, to be greeted by the same shifty-looking monk in rags. He had apparently heard of our visit to the Living Buddha, where we must have made quite an impression. At any rate he was obviously determined to make amends for our unceremonious reception that other evening.

He showed us first to the royal guest room for visiting princes, then, changing his mind, led us into the Living Buddha's own bed-

room. It was small, but exquisitely decorated, with rich rugs and finely-carved k'ang-tables in red and gold. On the walls were stretched long horizontal scrolls showing officials of the last dynasty in vivid blue robes and scarlet-tufted hats with peacock feathers, officiating at an imperial birthday party in the palace at Peking.

This time, when I asked for the Grand Lama, our ragamuffin host brought in a slightly more respectable figure. The latter accepted my gifts with a little too much eagerness, and presently made a return donation of a cup of butter and some crisp goat-cheese. The dinner that night was better than usual, though of course it could not compare with the feast at Ch'ien-li.

The next morning, as we were about to leave, the host monk presented me with a magnificent gilt-bronze image of Tara, the Tibetan goddess of Mercy, and produced a couple of other fine images to sell to my companions. Seeing that he was in a selling mood, I mentioned an old temple banner I had seen in a side hall on my first visit, and asked if it would be possible to buy that.

Our rascally-looking host said no, the Grand Lama was absent, and only he had the key to that hall. I started to ask who the "Grand Lama" was who had been brought to meet us last night, but the host monk sensed my question before I asked it. He looked down at his boots for a moment with a ridiculous expression of shy embarrassment. Then, to change the subject, he walked over to the Living Buddha's "god-box" in the corner and offered to sell us the images from this private shrine. Of course we refused.

We concluded then that the decay of Shandagu monastery was not entirely due to looting from without; but I am still surprised that all the responsible monks should have gone away and left the place in the hands of such a character.

The horses of my companions had both developed saddle sores, so they rode back with the ma-fu by the more direct way, via Manhui, while I took the slightly longer route down the range to Beilighe Temple, as we had originally intended. I wanted to see the intervening stretch of range with its passes, and particularly Dungsher Temple, which until a few weeks ago had been the residence of one of the Mongol princes, a refugee from the Japanese in the east of the province.

It was a beautiful morning, with light dew sparkling on the marsh grasses as I passed the ferry and turned on down the range. There

was no real trail, but a collection of vague tracks that led between Mongol settlements, and I could always follow the range. The Mongols along here were also living in semipermanent houses with plots of millet, and appeared to be mostly Dalats, judging by the women's headdresses. Once or twice I stopped and tried to talk to them, but they did not seem to know Chinese and just gaped at me. They looked as though the spectacle of a foreigner riding alone off the beaten track was too much for them. Perhaps it was that that had tied their tongues.

As I rode along the foot of the mountains, dark clouds gathered around the peaks high above me, and before long I heard the low roll of thunder reverberating in the summits. Just as the storm was about to break, I sighted the white buildings of a lamasery, on a terrace above a dry river bed. It was Dungsher Temple, and by the time the clouds broke I was under cover, drinking tea with an old lama.

This temple, too, had had its share of bad treatment. The border-Chinese soldiers of the prince's guard had been there for a considerable time, and had done plenty of damage. But by some miracle the lamas seemed to have succeeded in keeping them out of the sanctuary, which was still intact. Possibly they had managed to do this because, unlike the other temples of the region, this had an altar at the end of the main hall, instead of the more usual throne for an abbot or Living Buddha. By keeping the sanctuary proper locked, with its doors hidden by paintings, the monks might have convinced the soldiers that this altar was their only shrine.

They had no compunctions about letting me in, though, after I had expressed my interest in Lamaism. Judging by the very old paintings and finer images, this must have been one of the oldest of the temples in this region. It was amply worth the long side trip.

Only two of the lamas were at the temple, including the one that had invited me in to tea. They struck me as being particularly fine and reverent men, of a more religious type than one usually finds among the lamas nowadays. Perhaps this remote location, off the usual routes of travel, had kept them free from contamination. At any rate, it was refreshing to meet men like this after the conduct of the scoundrels at Shandagu.

The land around the monastery was bare, as usual. Probably most of these sites originally had grass around them, until the herds

of sheep and goats belonging to the temples had removed the cover by close-cropping and digging with their sharp hoofs, releasing the topsoil to blow away as dust. For some reason, though, this terrace looked unusually bleak and forsaken, and before I left I decided it was downright sinister. As we approached the prayer-barrel house, a deadly pit viper lying on the steps snapped into a tight coil and raised its diamond-shaped head to strike. Then, as I was mounting my horse to leave, I looked down to see two good-sized scorpions jockeying for combat, while from above a great vulture stared down from a crag.

If the lamas here were finer than usual, the same could not be said of the wild life. I was glad to get away.

All the way down to Beilighe Temple, tracks of horses' hoofs, and of the carts on which the dismantled yurts are carried from place to place, led in toward the gorges which opened out into inner valleys and passes. Though the Mongols lived quite far apart, there must have been plenty of them in the vicinity. I only passed one group of people, a family coming back from a visit to relatives. I could tell by the womens' headdresses that they were Oirats.

At one place, near a river mouth, I caught sight of a small terrace that seemed to have more regular lines than most. Coming nearer I noticed courses of round boulders laid down as a retaining wall, among the coarse grass on its sides. Then when I climbed it, the upper surface was covered with roof tiles of a type no longer used in the local architecture. It must have been quite an old site, perhaps going back to Tangut times. The base of this range should be a paradise for properly trained archeologists.

After a short visit with the monks at Beilighe I started home, hoping to make camp by dinner time. All hopes for this went by the board when I reached the river near Farmer Li's. The ferry scow was tied up on the far side of the badly swollen stream with no one in it. I called over to a small village near the landing to say that I wanted to cross, and a soldier sitting on one of the flat roofs shouted the obvious reply, that the ferryman was not there.

In desperation I stripped, and tied my clothes, shoes, and gun-belt atop the saddle with the stirrup leathers, then plunged in beside the horse. He nearly drowned me when we first hit deep water, by trying to climb on my back in his panic. Luckily I managed to keep hold of the half-submerged ferry rope, and the swift current forced

him downstream from me, though we were still connected by the reins. It was something of a nightmare for both of us.

As I was dressing, outwardly frozen, but inwardly hot with anger at the ferryman who was not there, an old farmer appeared on the far bank with his melon-laden donkey, and he too shouted across for the ferry. This time there was an answering hail as the ferryman sauntered out of one of the huts in the nearby settlement, wiping food off his moustache.

He quickly found himself taking an unexpected bath—in shallow water. For a moment he was as wet and angry as I. Then a country boy who had come up to see the foreigner, and was holding my horse for me as I dressed, broke out laughing. I began to feel very foolish at my un-Asiatic display of temper, and laughed too. The ferryman joined in, as he splashed ashore, and we all went our respective ways feeling much better.

13

MONGOL FESTIVAL

EVER SINCE we had come to Shanpa, we had been hearing about the Autumn Festival of the Mongols, held at their principal temples on the first of the Eighth Month (of the old Chinese calendar), and the "Devil Dances" they had on that occasion. I had seen the huge masks, with faces of animals and demons several times life-size, hanging in the inner shrines of the temples, and was naturally eager to see them in use.

Then, one Sunday evening when three of us were in town for a Chinese dinner, we met Dunguerbo and a lama from Beilighe. They brought me an invitation from the abbot, asking me to visit his temple for the festival. They had tried to reach me at camp, but the Mongol-hating guards had not even permitted them to leave a message. The lama said he thought they would not be giving a Devil Dance this year, but there would be a big celebration, and Dunguerbo added that Mongol families would be coming from a great distance, so we shouldn't miss it.

The only problem was that they could not tell me the exact date in the modern calendar, but a Chinese friend calculated that it would be the following Friday. Meanwhile I found three other fellows who wanted to go, being interested in the festival from a photographic point of view: Fred the magician, Walter Hill, and Don Lund. We planned to start at dawn on Friday morning, so we would not miss anything.

On Thursday morning I happened to be visiting one of the Chinese officers, and noticed that his calendar had both sets of dates. The old-style one said that this was the first day of the eighth month! It was then about eleven o'clock, and we had over twenty miles to ride, including the river crossing.

I quickly collected the other three men. We rolled up our blankets and a few rations, loading them on a pack horse so we could ride light and fast. Then we started ahead, leaving Hui, the ma-fu, to follow

with the gear. We kept up a fast clip, and got to the temple about 2:30.

We found that there was no dance, and that we had missed the principal ceremony in the morning. Dunguerbo, who came out to meet us, said that the main thing we had missed was the worship of an enormous painting let down from the roof of the main temple to hang over the front of the building. Still we were glad we had come. A large assembly of Mongols was milling around, and we had never seen so much fine jewelry.

In the course of the afternoon we met again all the people we had seen on our trip up the pass, but we recognized them with difficulty. We had seen them living in what seemed to be very humble circumstances, and now they were decked out like peacocks. The women had long robes of fine serge in rather bright colors, with the same type of short, sleeveless vests they had worn in the mountains. But this time the vests were of heavy satin with wide ornamental borders worked in gold. They had pounds of silver on their heads, having added long pendant chains to their earrings, swiks, and bridal crowns, and each had several coral necklaces. In most cases the finery atop their heads was partly hidden by their head scarfs, which today were of silk instead of coarse cloth, and were more revealing. A number of the older women had on unshaped fedora hats over their silver crowns. Apparently the wearers of these hats considered them the height of fashion, and no doubt they lent much "face" as expensive importations, but they gave a rather ridiculous, foreign note to the otherwise splendid costumes.

Most of the women and even a few of the children wore around their necks the silver charm boxes that usually reposed in the "god-box," or on the altar-rack at the back of the yurts. These had wide borders of hammered silver showing various holy symbols, setting off a small glass panel through which we could see paintings of their patron gods or goddesses. A favorite subject seemed to be Lhamo, "the Terrible Goddess," riding over the sea of blood, with the flayed skin of her son as a saddle rug. I wondered how many of the wearers had ever really looked at her, and what effect the picture had on their imaginations, if they had.

The men were dressed more conservatively in long dark robes or odds and ends of Chinese uniforms. Some, however, had new boots of fancy leatherwork, and a few were wearing the silver-

mounted ceremonial knife-sets that seem to be passing out of use as the Mongols gradually become poorer.

Dunguerbo's father was there, more handsomely dressed than most, in a blue serge robe, with a sleeveless jacket of purple silk edged in gold brocade. One of the lamas explained that he was an official in his Banner, and therefore sometimes wore a Chinese official uniform, as he had when we first saw him, but he was also a *Taiji,* a second-degree noble, entitled to a blue hat-jewel. This accounted for his rich robes but not for his hat. Instead of the Mongolian official hat of white straw sloping up to a sapphire-studded spike, and a pendant peacock feather, to which he was entitled by his rank, he just had an unshaped felt like those of the women.

Dunguerbo's father welcomed us and led us to the old abbot, Löpön Dorje, who was presiding over the guest hall. He greeted us warmly and seated us on rug cushions at the far end of the hall. Beside us sat the only other non-Mongols: an old landlord who lived nearby on the plain and two Chinese traders. I learned later that they were all honorary Oirats, adopted into the Banner, but I noticed at the time how they seemed genuinely to like the Mongols, in contrast to most of the other border Chinese we had met.

As we talked to the abbot and the other guests, some lamas set small wooden tables before us with gold-lacquered wooden bowls containing pretzel-shaped bread sticks and crisp sections of creamy "milk-skin," together with smaller porcelain bowls of millet, hard, brown goat cheese, and clarified butter, to "improve" the tea to follow.

After eating and presenting our gifts, which consisted principally of a roll of fine green satin from Shanpa market, and a package of American cigarettes, a couple of lamas took us over to see the preparations in the main temple. More pictures had been hung, more rugs laid along the seats, and large trays of mutton and other foods were set before the principal altar in the inner sanctuary.

For an hour or so we wandered around, talking with people and snapping pictures. Then they brought us back to the temple, and a lama ushered me to a carved throne-dais against the left wall, near the altar, with my companions on a bench to my right. Beyond them sat the three Mongol-Chinese guests; and across from us, against the right wall, sat the Mongol women and children. Most of the lamas filed in and took their seats on the two middle rows of prayer benches,

facing each other across the central aisle. Then the Mongol laymen trooped in to occupy the other two rows. Young novices quickly ran up and filled the tea bowls on the low tables before each guest. Then the ceremony began.

As the cymbals clashed and the trumpets brayed, two of the senior lamas began a deep-voiced chant. Two accolytes then came out of the sanctuary and passed out magic arrows hung with silken streamers and filmy blue katagh scarfs to the chief guests. They gave me one of the scarfs and asked me to hold it with outstretched hands, thumbs up, throughout the service. Luckily it did not last very long.

Two lamas, dressed as secular princes of an earlier day, in red and purple, and orange and yellow satin, respectively, then came forward and knelt on rugs marked with swastika patterns in grain, before the sanctuary door. Attendants within the sanctuary passed out the sacrifices to them, while the seated lamas prayed in chorus. The two "princes" knocked their heads on the floor before the offerings. Then one of them picked up a joint of mutton on a stick and smeared the top of the outer doorway and some of the outer columns with the grease, after which both proceeded to distribute the food to other lamas, who placed the bowls before the guests. The two then stood to one side, with considerable dignity, while everybody else fell to. It looked as though they were re-enacting some earlier pre-lama rite of the Mongols, at which the rulers made an autumn sacrifice and distributed food to the people.

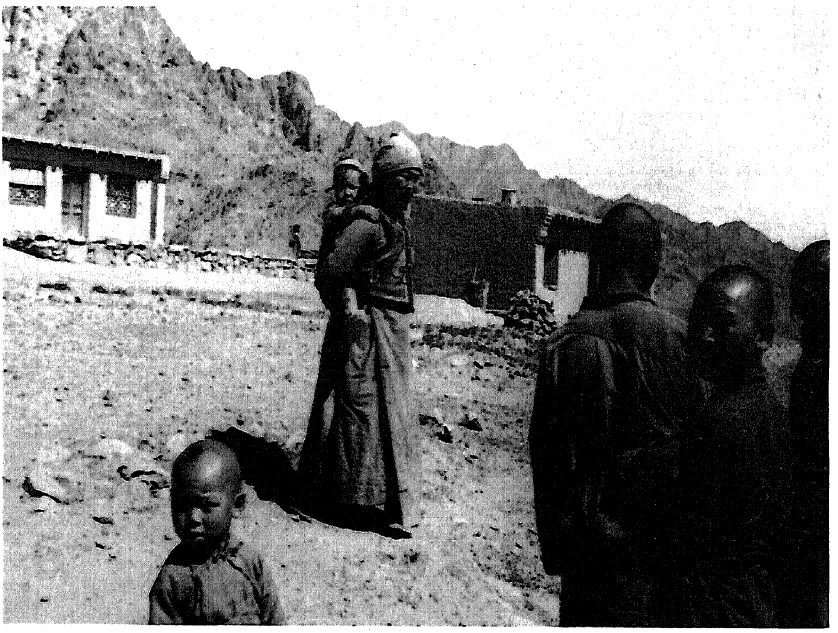
We were honored with a whole sheep, and the lamas who came around to collect the scarfs and arrows brought us long sheath knives to cut off pieces with. Much as I enjoyed the tender, juicy morsels of mutton which we excavated from under the layer of fat on the saddle, I felt rather strange to be eating meat in a Buddhist temple. One of the Buddha's strictest rules had been against the eating of living things, and I was surprised that the monks not only permitted it, but ate some too.

This feast, generous as it was, was only a preliminary one, to be followed by another of mutton noodles in the guest house. This time the guests were fed by rank; first the Mongol heads of families, and the honorary Oirats and us, then the lesser Mongol males, and finally the women and very young children.

After the last people had eaten, Fred offered to give a magic show, which was interpreted by Dunguerbo. The enthusiastic animation of

The Abbot, Löpon Dorje, receives some guests.
(Photo by W. E. Hill.)

Two Oirat matrons in festival finery.



A Mongol woman brings her child to the Festival.
(*Photos by W. E. Hill.*)

the Mongols was a great contrast to the greater reserve of a Chinese audience. The men laughed and nudged each other, and most of the women giggled until their headdresses tinkled. The only quiet ones were two mothers who sat more stolidly in the back of the room while their chubby babies fed contentedly at their breasts.

The next day we rose early, in time to see a beautiful sunrise over the misty plain. The gorge behind us was still black with shadows, but the mountain tops and prominent crags were a rosy pink in the first shafts of morning light. Some of the Mongols had already left in the night, and most of the rest had risen early and were preparing their horses or camels to leave. Dunguerbo and his father were among the few still there.

The night before I had talked with Dunguerbo and his father, and some of the local hunters, about passes across the mountains. I had seen a large temple called Bayan Shanda-in Sume marked on the crude, local sketch maps of the Gobi, and was very anxious to see it, and satisfy my curiosity about the great desert, if that could be possible. It seemed important to use a pass that would permit our taking horses, for the temple was some distance out in the desert, so this ruled out Beilighe Pass. The Mongols could not agree which of the others would be best, and we had turned in without coming to any decision. This morning Dunguerbo's father suggested Dabatu Pass, and offered us his son to be our guide.

I was delighted. Several times before we had thought it would be fine to have someone like Dunguerbo with us, to tell us what we should or should not do, and help us in our relations with strange Mongols. We had never thought of asking him outright, though, knowing that he had a special position among the Oirats, and feeling that his pride might be hurt. Now that the offer had come from his father, we had no hesitation in accepting. He could ride the pack horse, we assured him. I think he was as excited as we were at the prospect of an exploration trip, whether or not we succeeded in getting across the mountains.

We stayed at the temple for breakfast, and as we took our leave, Löpön Dorje presented us with blue kataghs, and held our horses as we mounted. He was the perfect host.

14

DOWN THE RANGE TO DABATU PASS

FROM BEILIGHE Temple we rode south along the range for a few miles, to a camp of three yurts belonging to Dunguerbo's sister and some cousins. Here Dunguerbo borrowed a heavy fleece coat to serve as a combination saddle pad, cold-weather garment, and sleeping bag. His aunt was busy milking the goats, and some of his cousins were making preparations to move away, as it had been only a temporary camp while they attended the festival. We talked to his sister for a short while, then set out again.

We rode on down to another pass and turned up a gorge to see a temple that Dunguerbo said we should not miss. This river was still running out onto the plain and had wiped out any tracks there might have been. The water was only a few inches deep, but we had to pick our way among tumbled boulders. The walls of the gorge were steep and trackless. It seemed impossible that anyone could live in such a forbidding setting. Then suddenly we rounded a curve and came upon a grassy bank with two white Tibetan-style buildings, one of which had the red stripe of a lamasery. They seemed especially white with the green below, and the reddish rock of the main range rising steeply behind them. The whole site, in the womb of the mountains, brought back keen memories of Tibetan-border temples, and the illusion was almost complete when I saw that the temple nameboard was written solely in Tibetan script. The only specifically Mongol elements were a yurt in the foreground, and the lamasery's name, Meirin Sume.

The temple porch was brightly painted with frescoes of the Four Kings, and the interior was a vision of real splendor, an example of what a Mongol temple could be when it escaped occupation and looting by the Chinese. The red lacquer columns were wrapped in pillar rugs of imperial yellow—rugs that had an apparently incomplete pattern until they were wrapped around a column, when the ends met to form a continuous design. On the side walls hung

relatively new paintings, done in the traditional manner with the old colors established by long custom, and mounted in frames of Chinese brocade. The hanging silken banners and the prayer rugs on the benches were quite new and very clean. The images, ritual vessels, hand bells, and even the cups of human skulls were all highly polished. In every way this temple presented a contrast to the rather filthy—by our standards—and neglected appearance of most lama shrines, whether in Tibet or Mongolia.

The explanation was, no doubt, that it was very new; but I was still surprised at its remoteness and seclusion. For, while many lamaseries are partially hidden, so that the approaching traveler will be more awed by coming on them suddenly, most of the ones we had seen were located on often-used passes or trade routes, where they could be accessible to wayfarers as inns and places of refuge. Perhaps this had been set apart to allow the monks uninterrupted meditation—but that did not seem likely. These lamas looked more embittered than holy, though they were very hospitable to us. Dunguerbo could not tell me why the temple had been built here, and the lamas would not.

The real reason was only too clear when, some weeks later, we saw the wreck the local Chinese had made of Old Meirin Temple, the monastery from which these monks had come. It had been confiscated and turned first into a barracks, then into a military high school. Unfortunately, that had been too accessible down on the plain. The handful of monks that remained from the once great temple, in rebuilding with what they had salvaged, were determined to be as inaccessible as possible. They seemed to have succeeded.

After a short visit, and some tea with the lamas, we returned to the desert in the old course of the Yellow River, near a tall and narrow detached mountain. From a distance it seemed to be crowned with the ruins of a fortress, and certainly no bandit chieftain could have asked for a more commanding site. As we neared it, the "ruins" turned out to be an enormous cairn or *öbö,* flanked by lesser piles of rocks built out along the knife-edge of the ridge in both directions. Dunguerbo, calling my attention to the redness of the mountain and of the stones from which the cairn was built, said it was known as the Ulan Öbö, or "Red Cairn," and had been built to protect the region against evil spirits and to insure luck in hunting. He considered it very sacred.

We rode on past this, in the face of a strong southwest wind. It blew harder and harder and began to whip up a considerable sandstorm. Within an hour or two the air was a greyish purple haze and the sun faded into a dim orange-red ball. Our throats felt hot and dry, and our canteens were almost empty. Just as we began to wonder how we could keep on, half-blinded by the wind-blown sand, another very large pass opened out on our right. Dunguerbo led us up this to another monastery called Borin Temple.

Though its principal hall, or *dogan,* was almost empty after a recent, rather thorough looting, the external appearance of the monastery as a whole was superb. The long, low white buildings rose in tiers up the steep face of the chocolate-brown cliff, at the juncture of two valleys.

We were received in a small courtyard behind the main temple and led into a guest room, where we immediately became the center of a throng of curious Mongols who had stayed on after the ceremonies of the day before. These seemed to be much wealthier than those at Beilighe, and were even more finely dressed. They had especially handsome horses and camels, and some had saddles edged in brass, figured with cloisonné enamel, and stirrups of the same. Like the Mongols of Beilighe Pass at our first meeting, they were very eager to know about our clothes and shoes and cameras. Dunguerbo was kept busy answering their questions.

Some lamas brought us tea and millet, and soon the abbot strode in. He was a serious-looking man of about thirty-five, in robes of blue serge with a yellow sash. We presented him with a roll of blue satin, and a few small trinkets, including a magnet and some steel needles. He was very surprised to see what the magnet could do to the needles, but he seemed to be making a special effort not to show his astonishment too openly.

Then the host lama, who had done most of the talking, asked us if we would like to take tea with the "Living Buddha." When we said we would be glad to, he escorted us uphill to a yurt set up beside one of the larger residence buildings. We seated ourselves expectantly on either side of the abbot in blue, who presided silently over another banquet of buttered tea and cheese, and mutton noodles.

We kept waiting for the "Living Buddha" to arrive. I thought there was only one of these incarnations in the immediate district, and was expecting the Living Buddha of Shandagu, who gra-

ciously presented himself at other monasteries on special occasions, now and then. Finally I asked Dunguerbo when the Living Buddha was coming, and much to my embarrassment was told that he already was here. Gampe Dorje, abbot and Living Buddha, was the silent one in blue!

Returning to the guest house in the twilight, Fred prepared a magic show at the request of Dunguerbo and the host lama. He was giving it by the feeble light of butter lamps, but for one trick he thought he should have a spotlight. I innocently picked up his flashlight and focused it in his direction. The reaction was immediate. Already mystified and somewhat frightened by the display of the "black arts," the Mongols must have thought this was another manifestation of our occult powers. They pushed back toward the walls, away from the beam, and when I inadvertently turned the light so it fell on a group of them, they quickly scattered like frightened chickens.

Aside from this, the show was a great success. Because of it, I was surprised to see that Fred was looking a little glum. He admitted that the show had gone over well, but he said he was also somewhat disappointed. He had hoped that his tricks would draw out corresponding efforts on the part of lama conjurers, who had been famous in legend since the days of Marco Polo. He recalled the Venetian's account of state banquets at the court of Khubilai Khan, when lama sorcerers caused flagons of milk and wine to fill the drinking cups spontaneously; then caused the cups to move through the air for a distance of ten paces to the hand of the Great Khan; and brought them back again when he had emptied them. If any lama conjurers still exist, we never found one. But the fact that the lamas were so awed at the simplest of tricks made it fairly obvious that they did not have even the rudiments of this kind of magic.

We had plenty of evidence of this next morning. After breakfast I casually picked up a thin slab of wood outside, and taking out a reading glass, proceeded to burn on the prayer *Om mani padme hum* in Tibetan script, along with the crossed thunderbolts usually found on lama charms. As the watching monks saw the thin plume of smoke rising from the wood, they stared in gaping astonishment. When I had finished and set the slab on the shrine-box in the corner of the guest room, they gathered around it rather squeamishly to read the words, but they were afraid to touch it.

I think they were glad when we left without doing any actual damage by our "powers."

We returned to the plain and pushed on toward Dabatu Pass. As we rode the mountain wall seemed unbroken as far as we could see, but when we were still at some distance, Dunguerbo pointed out the ruins of a massive stone fortress on a terrace, which he said marked the mouth of the pass. Even at a distance, its square shape reminded me, on a much larger scale, of the watchtower near the pass that marked the entrance to the Ordos. That was supposed to date from before the days of Jenghis Khan, and I imagined that this was equally old.

With my sense of history aroused by the sight of the fortress, I asked Dunguerbo what the present-day Mongols thought of Marco Polo's patron, Khubilai Khan. He said he had never heard of him, despite the fact that his father's title of *Taiji* is supposed to be confined to the descendants of Jenghis Khan, who had founded Khubilai's line. He seemed greatly surprised when I told him the part his people had played in world history, and the great extent of their empire in the thirteenth century of our era. Evidently General Fu's "Western Oirat School" at Beilighe Temple had carefully avoided teaching anything that might arouse the boys' interest in their national culture. They had never even had anything as practical as history or geography; just some Chinese Nationalist songs and a few characters.

He deserved a better education, being very quick and sharp. He picked up quite a number of English words from us, during that week's trip, asking us to pronounce them slowly, and transcribing them in Mongolian script on the inside of a matchbox cover we had given him. I was surprised to see him writing in Mongolian, since that was certainly not taught in the Oirat School. I asked him about it.

"I learned it from my lama teacher so I could read scriptures," he replied. I still did not grasp the full significance of this remark, until some days later when we were talking about his family. I could not understand why none of his brothers was living in a monastery.

"I thought every family had to give a son to a temple," I exclaimed.

"That is true," he replied, "I am the lama."

We had never suspected this, having grown accustomed to seeing him in his khaki uniform, but probably his being a lama was the only reason he had ever been given an education, in spite of his father's noble rank.

When we reached the pass, we went up to visit an insignificant lamasery, Tömei Temple, and I strolled over to see the ruins of the old fortress, hoping to pick up something of interest. Dunguerbo had told me that in such places as these the Mongols of the present day still find small bronzes, knives, and arrowheads. The latter were no doubt those shot by their ancestors under Jenghis Khan, but now they do not even know what they once were used for. We saw several being carried by lamas as amulets. They simply called them "Little Thunderbolts" or "Gifts from Heaven." Sometimes they also find the bronze crosses left by Nestorian Christians, who once chanted praises to our God in cities and villages where now is wasteland. But not knowing their meaning, either, the present-day Mongols treat these, too, simply as lucky pieces to protect them against misfortune.

My search was useless. The local people who lived around Tömei Temple had used the walled area as a winter goat paddock for years, and animal droppings covered the original surface everywhere.

We remounted and said goodbye to the monks of Tömei, then rode down into the gorge. This also had a small river flowing in it, but we kept to the drier trails along the bank as much as possible, to prevent the horses' hoofs from getting too wet and soft. After a mile or so, the gorge was abruptly terminated by a mountain of sand, from the base of which gushed the source of the river.

This was only the first of several gigantic dunes, that now clogged what must once have been an important thoroughfare, judging by the size of the fort at its entrance. The people at Tömei told us that on windy days it is practically impossible to get through the pass. Heavy clouds of wind-blown sand sweep down off the Gobi, and are carried out to add to the desert that has already begun to overwhelm the grazing land at the foot of the pass. It was lucky we had not reached there a day earlier, or we would have been caught in the midst of the storm that we had felt the effects of, several miles away.

As we toiled up the successive dunes toward the majestic red-brown peaks, leading our horses, Dunguerbo felt stimulated by the

surroundings and broke into a series of Mongol songs. He told us they were the ones usually sung by mountain hunters or camel riders. They were rather plaintive, with a pronounced yodeling quality such as I had noticed in the songs of the Tibetan shepherds some years ago. They sounded very refreshing after the high-pitched yowling of the Chinese soldiers and servants around camp.

After what seemed like interminable climbing, we came out onto a high upland saddle, where dark, bare peaks thrust upward bleakly out of coarse scrub and sagebrush. From here the trail sloped gradually downward onto the plain. We did not have to ride far to reach the level. The land on the far side of the pass was much higher than the Hou-T'ao Plain. It formed part of the great Mongolian Plateau. What had seemed to us, on our side, as very high mountains, were only low hills from here. What we had always thought of as the "range" was only the outer edge of the plateau. The valleys between the projecting western spurs of the hills were carpeted with lush meadowland, where sleek herds of Mongol ponies and fat beef cattle were set out to graze.

Our objective was an "inn" that we had heard about from the lamas of Tömei. This turned out to be a smoke-blackened yurt on the edge of the meadowland, kept by an outcast Chinese. Dunguerbo distrusted him, without explaining why, so we kept on, looking for a Mongol settlement. Seeing those herds, we knew the owners could not be too far away.

The sun was getting lower, and it was very cold at this height so we began to gallop. We only halted when Dunguerbo sighted a herd of sheep up a side valley, with a woman tending them. We started to ride in that direction, when Fred discovered that he had lost his gun belt in the gallop. He immediately wanted to go back and look for the pistol, as he could not afford to lose it permanently. And because it would not be safe for a man to get caught by darkness alone in this wild country, I went back with him. I rode up on a spur to keep the others in sight, while he tried to retrace our trail below.

I was letting my horse pick his own way, and he led me to a "blowout" between the dunes, where the top sand had been blown off to disclose base gravel. The slanting rays of the setting sun threw odd shadows from what looked like pieces of grey stone. I dismounted and found they were pieces of prehistoric pottery, and look-

ing further, found a fine, red flint knife. These were undoubtedly relics of the "Dune-dwellers'" civilization, first reported by the men who went with Roy Chapman Andrews on his Gobi expeditions. I felt very excited.

When it grew too dark to look further for the gun belt, we returned to the side valley where we had seen the sheep. On the way, we met Dunguerbo who had ridden back to look for us, and he led us to the yurt he had found. In addition to the woman we had seen, and her one-eyed husband, who was a hunter, we found an old lama visiting them. There were already too many people in the yurt for us to think of spending the night there, but they invited us to use the hearth for cooking, and gave us water to make coffee.

Before we had finished dinner, still another guest came, a Mongol woman with her two-year old child strapped papoose-wise to her back. She was returning on foot from the festival at Borin Temple. This particular yurt seemed as crowded as Grand Central Station, even though it was off the beaten track.

After eating a few rations, we left the warm fire with reluctance and went down to the dry river bed below, where we rolled up in our blankets on the soft sand. It was freezing cold at that high altitude and an arctic wind was sweeping down the shallow gorge. We managed to get out of the direct blast, but we still froze.

We slept badly, and woke in the early dawn to see the white forms of mountain sheep silhouetted against the skyline, looking curiously down at us from the crags above. Later when I went over to get Dunguerbo, who was having breakfast with the Mongol family, I found a discarded pair of horns from one of these sheep outside the yurt. The old ram who had worn them must have resembled our Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, though he belonged to another species, *ovis argali.* Although broken at the tips, each horn measured forty and one half inches around the outer curve, and sixteen inches around the base.

We were strongly tempted to stop and hunt. If we had had anything except pistols with us, we would not have hesitated. As it was, we could scarcely hope to get within range of a sheep on those crags, so we gave up the idea. We rode back to the main valley, made a quick and successful search for the gun belt, then rode on down the stream bed into the Gobi Desert.

15

TEMPLE IN THE GOBI

IT was a strange feeling to ride out into the Gobi. Although our camp was popularly known as "the Gobi Weather Station" by the few Americans in China who had ever heard of it, in the year and a half since it had been set up, none of its personnel had ever seen the Gobi Desert. Until now, we had scarcely expected to, either.

Beyond the protection of the mountain spurs, large, bare sand dunes were encroaching on the rich pasture land at the base of the hills, but the Gobi proper was anything but barren. Sizable clumps of desert vegetation—sagebrush and thorn bushes especially—grew everywhere in the gravel between the shifting dunes. Here and there all the surface sand and plant-supporting gravel had blown away, exposing the bare ground. Scattered among the pebbles were bits of petrified bone, flint razors, and chips of jasper left by neolithic tool-makers. This land must have had a considerable population before the soil grew too dry to support human life. At intervals we came across twisting creek beds cutting deep into the desert floor, but all were dry. If it ever did rain here, the soft sand of their channels would not hold water long before absorbing it.

After riding about ten miles, we mounted a dune and saw our objective, Bayan Shanda-in Sume (*Shantan Miao,* in Chinese). It was a vast monastery of white buildings stretched out against the yellow sand of a hillside, with an enormous chorten, a great stupa temple, looming above them near the top of the hill. The shimmering heat waves through which we first saw the buildings made it look like a mirage, and we could not believe that we would find such a large temple in this barren waste.

We lost sight of it again as we descended into a sloping plain. The desert seemed bleaker than ever. Two antelopes ambled out from behind a dune. Then they saw us and were off with bobbing white tails. Ahead of us we saw several herds of grazing camels, fine, well-fed animals with plenty of fur. Dunguerbo said they must

be temple property. Sure enough, as we mounted the rise, among them, we saw the monastery spread out on the other slope of a transverse valley. It was more impressive than ever.

In addition to twelve main temples of Tibetan architecture, with one or two Chinese roofs looming above the predominantly flat ones, it had several lesser shrines, along with extensive dormitories for the monks and lodgings for travelers. As we rode up to the buildings, however, we saw that many of them had been gutted—and the Chinese slogans told us by whom. We later found that the Chinese troops had come "in the year of the Tiger" (1938), to forestall a Japanese column hoping to cut off Shanpa. But they had stayed six years, to prevent further forays. Meanwhile they had used some of the worship halls as barracks, carving up the walls, looting everything portable that was of value, and otherwise desecrating the holy places.

We tethered our horses to a hitching line between two posts, alongside some Mongol ponies. Not only were they much finer than our own good mounts, but they were decked out with silver-mounted saddles and fine blue saddle rugs that put our scuffed English saddles and drab army blankets to shame.

Dunguerbo led us into one of the guest compounds, where a stout and jovial host monk met us and opened up the main reception room for us. It was a long hall with columns, and at the end was a dais with five thrones. The center one was elevated on cushions for a prince or a Living Buddha, so we carefully chose the lower ones, leaving that vacant. The back and seat of each throne was faced with expensive rugs, figured with five-clawed imperial dragons in blue and gold, and before each seat was the customary low table, but of unusual quality, with thick red lacquer and heavy gilding to set off finely carved designs.

Twenty or thirty lamas and monastery attendants came in to stare at us as we drank buttered tea with *tsamba* meal—the national food of the Tibetans. We sensed a strong atmosphere of hostile suspicion mixed with their curiosity, and the expression on the faces of one or two bruisers of the monastery "strong-arm squad" was anything but pleasant. These were the biggest Mongols I had ever seen, and they looked like fighters.

We tried to look unconcerned and keep our dignity, but this was not easy to do, as we were already being attacked from another direc-

tion. The lice in the rugs had discovered us, and were beginning to explore inside our clothing.

The tension relaxed a little when a very old lama with a grey, wispy beard came in, attended by two of the senior lamas. He stopped to say something to Dunguerbo, who was sitting nearer the door, and the latter announced to me that he was the acting head of the monastery, taking the place of the abbot who was on a pilgrimage to Kumbum.

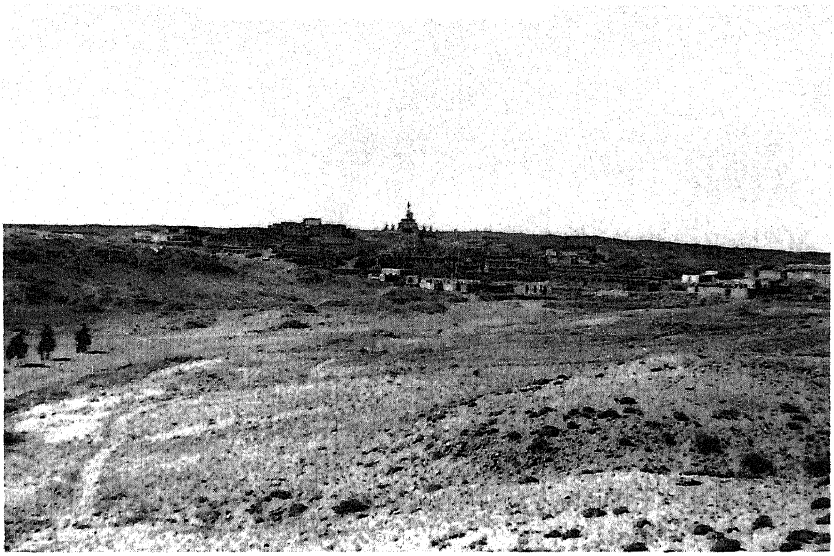
The three then continued on up to our dais, and with low bows presented their onyx snuff bottles to each of us in turn. Not having our own to return the compliment, we just bowed and handed them back, and I gave them a gift. Then they bowed once more, and walked over to a side bench, where they seated themselves and stared at us in solemn silence.

In an effort to break the ice, I blunderingly asked how many monks they had in the monastery. This was apparently just the wrong remark. As we were already under suspicion as spies or possible raiders, it must have seemed to them that we were trying to feel out the potential strength of the place. No one answered as Dunguerbo translated my question. He flushed. The atmosphere was frigid.

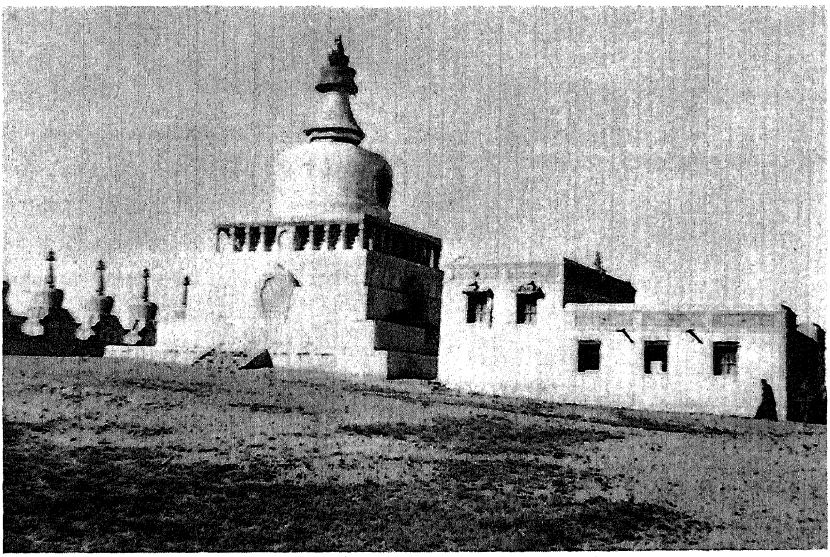
Dunguerbo explained their attitude in part by telling us that the lamas had previously told him that no foreigners—that is, white men—had been there since before the War, and they did not know what to make of us. He did not say, though I found out later, that the only white men that most of them had ever known were the Russians who had driven them out of Outer Mongolia. That in itself would have accounted for their attitude.

To ease a rather intolerable situation, I asked Dunguerbo to arrange for us to see the temples, suggesting that he explain to the lamas that I had come there because of my interest in Buddhism. They did not seem particularly convinced. In cold silence one monk went out to get the keys, and one of the attendants to the acting head lama escorted us to the first great temple.

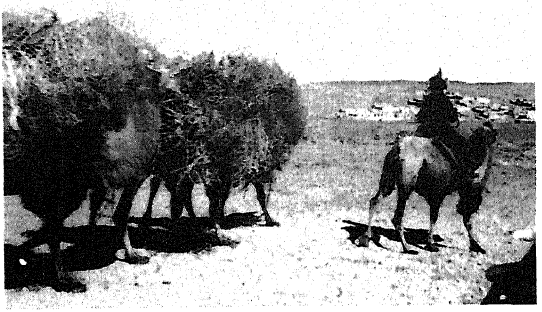
Much to my surprise, in spite of their obvious hostility, they showed us everything, including sacred inner shrines usually closed even to Mongol laymen. Most of these consisted of dark cabinets with blood-bespattered demon figures, grimacing horribly and crowned with skulls.



A Temple in the Gobi. Approaching Bayan Shanda-in Sume.



The Great Chorten at Bayan Shanda-in Sume.
(*Photos by W. E. Hill.*)



Camels bringing in sticks for temple fuel.

The temple butchers killing a goat by the "humane" method.

Lamas bringing in water for the temple.
(*Photos by W. E. Hill.*)

Several of the halls were very splendid, with elaborately carved and gilded woodwork, and many of their paintings were done in "Lhasa-style" with a great deal of gold, suggesting that they may have come directly from the holy city in Tibet. The most outstanding thing was a twenty-foot image of Maitreya, "the Coming Buddha," made of heavy plates of silver riveted together so cleverly that it seemed, at first glance, to be made in one piece. Unfortunately, its imposing and glittering appearance was completely marred by two equally large but tawdry-looking images of other bodhisattvas in cheap plaster, on either side of it.

When the lamas saw that I knew the names of the gods in Sanskrit and Tibetan (the official church languages), and was able to tell my companions something about them, they began to be more friendly. They were more cordial at supper, and the atmosphere thawed completely after the meal when I told the host monk that I could play Mongolian chess.

He got out a portable traveling set, consisting of a box that opened to make the board and some very large wooden chessmen. As he set them out, the usual crowd gathered around to help him. By now I did not mind this mass opposition, for I had meanwhile learned the Mongol names for the pieces. Now the conferences among my opponents were more help than annoyance. When I overheard them discussing a plot against one of my men, I was forewarned and could immediately take steps to get him out of danger. We were fairly evenly matched, and the good will of the lamas was assured when I lost a closely-contested game to their champion, after beating him in a previous one.

After we had finished playing, I took advantage of the newly established friendly spirit of the lamas to ask them some questions about the monastery. Now they were very agreeable and had no objections to telling me how many monks belonged there. Before the Chinese soldiers came, there were a hundred and fifty permanent residents. Now the temple had only room for about fifty or sixty, including the *badorchin* or begging monks, who traveled about the country collecting alms for the upkeep of the temples.

The next morning I woke drowsily on hearing hoofbeats, as someone galloped up to the outer gate. The sound started a series of associations, and I began to think how much this rolling, sagebrush-grown desert outside resembled our own American West.

Then I opened my eyes, and the illusion was almost complete when I saw hanging from the rafters, among some old bridles, a pair of branding irons with the monastery seal, two interlocking rings. The effect was soon shattered by the entrance of our host in his crimson robes, bearing a brass pot full of steaming noodles. Once more we were back in the Middle Ages.

After breakfast we met the man I had heard riding in. Like the other Mongol laymen we had seen around the monastery the evening before, he was dressed differently from the Mongols we had met on our side of the mountains. Not only did their boots have a much more pronounced upcurve, but their hats were also very distinctive. These had high-peaked fluted crowns of purplish cloth ending in a knob, and upturned brims which were faced with lamb's wool. Dunguerbo said that the Mongols here were all Khalkhas, Northern Mongols, from Outer Mongolia. He was a little ill at ease with them, but as one of the Khalka Banners belonged to the same League as the Oirats, he did not feel a complete stranger, and he seemed to have no trouble understanding them.

Later in the day, we rode up to see an enormous öbö atop a prominent hill nearby. From that vantage point we looked out over the plains to some low blue mountains. A lama with us said that they were in Outer Mongolia, only a day's ride from here by fast horse. I was all for riding to the border, but the lama sensibly dissuaded me. The land between, he said, was barren and waterless, no place to get lost in; while, border patrols, both Chinese and Russian, were inclined to shoot strangers on sight.

To visit the öbö, I rode one of the monastery camels, a she-camel with a vile disposition and worse manners. In fact, she had such a bad reputation that one of the lamas wanted to come along and lead her. But I preferred to ride alone, guiding her with the hair rope fastened to the wooden peg through her nose.

She would turn back to look at me now and then with a particularly supercilious expression, drooling acid, green cud, already partly digested. At intervals she would belch with hot, acrid breath. Her stomach rumbled constantly, and when I prodded her with my heels, she would whine, groan, or mutter, quickening her pace only when she felt like it. When we reached the öbö she resolutely refused to kneel, even for Dunguerbo, who had a way with animals. I was forced to slide off her back in very undignified fashion. It was

beneath her dignity to notice it, but I am sure a horse would have laughed.

The öbö was a sort of rustic chorten formed of loose stones around a central core. It was on top of a high hill over which passed one of the main caravan routes to Turkestan. For centuries passing travelers had thrown rocks or coins on it, in gratitude for having reached there in safety. Many coins had overshot the mark, and while resting after eating we amused ourselves by gathering them and collecting a complete set from the reigns of the last dynasty.

I took a very roundabout route back, to explore the hills behind the temple, from which there was an even more superb view of the plain stretching northward to Outer Mongolia. On the way back to our quarters, I passed a small detached shrine building. I recognized it as the monastery depository for holy things no longer usable, but too sacred to be destroyed or to be allowed to fall into profane hands.

I investigated it, and found a great number of sheafs of pages from holy books, some paintings in fair to bad condition, and a great number of pressed-clay images. On returning to the lamasery, I asked the host monk if it would be all right for us to take some of the pages and a painting or two. He replied that the building in question contained all that was left of the temple libraries, which had been sacked and desecrated by the Chinese soldiers, and that he would be glad to feel that some of the things were in the hands of people who could appreciate them. With this permission we went and helped ourselves.

Every time the monks mentioned Chinese, or soldiers, we noticed a wild gleam of anger in the eyes of the younger ones, and a look of sad resignation in the faces of the older. The wanton pillaging that began in the year of the Tiger would not soon be forgotten.

While I was taking a roundabout way back on the camel, the other three Americans had come back more directly on horseback. They reached the temple in time to see an interesting sight. The monastery needed meat, so a sturdy Mongol layman in dark robes, with two young lay attendants, had led out three goats. Taking them around the corner, out of sight from the temples, they had knelt on the animal's throats so as to partially smother them. Then they made a quick incision down the underside and reached in to pull out the hearts, which they squeezed until the animals were dead. In this way they shed a minimum amount of blood. After this, they carried

the carcasses into one of the kitchen buildings to dress them. Buddha commanded his followers not to eat meat, but the lamas rationalize their disobedience of his teachings by saying that meat is needed in this cold climate, and that it is not wrong for them to eat it if they do not see the killing.

The climax of this trip, for both us and the lamas, was the magic show held that afternoon in the courtyard of the guest house. The lamas were expecting a lot, having already been mystified by Fred's tricks with a magnetized needle and a disappearing cigarette.

The audience at the show consisted of about fifteen monks, a couple of Chinese-Moslem merchants passing through the district, and a very handsome Khalka woman, whose presence there alone cast some doubts on the seriousness of the monk's vows of celibacy. As Fred pulled brightly colored silks from empty boxes and snatched coins out of the air, they responded with exclamations of wild delight. No one in the audience had seen anything like it, and in broad daylight they had no sense of fear of the unknown. Their enthusiasm was intense. Dunguerbo was one reason for the great success. He outdid himself as an interpreter, enhancing the effect of each trick by being sure that the audience missed nothing. I wished I could understand everything he said; it would have been interesting to see how much he really grasped himself.

If any trace of suspicion or hostility still remained, the show banished it, and when we left next morning, the lamas of Shaṇda-in Sume seemed genuinely sorry to see us go. As a farewell present they gave us a large package of dried grapes which they said had come all the way from Turkestan, over the Old Silk Road.

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16

DUNGUERBO AND HIS FAMILY

WE LEFT BAYAN SHANDA-IN Temple with the good will of all the lamas. The host monk and several others came out to hold our horses as we mounted, and stood there watching us until we had rounded the turn past the first hill.

It was a cloudy morning with a threat of rain. The desert looked greyer and bleaker than ever, without the shadows of the dunes to give some contrast. As we entered Dabatu Pass, heavy storm clouds clung around the peaks, and a swirling cloud of grey sand filled the notch above us.

As we passed the blow-out on the terrace, near the place where Fred had lost his gun, Don and I turned aside to explore it once again. Walking back and forth in fairly straight lines, we combed the surface. In less than half an hour we had found countless pottery fragments, including some pieces of neolithic painted pottery, together with some more flints. We had enough to fill a sack, but space in my saddle bag was limited, so we kept only the best pieces and left the rest.

When we had finished our search, I picked up an *argali* horn, from a pair we had found nearby, and thought I would take it back to camp with us. I started to mount with it under my arm, but my horse saw it out of the corner of his eye. Unfamiliar things always bothered him, and he shied violently. For a moment I hung on, with one leg over the saddle. Then I fell heavily. The horse ran off in a panic, down the slope and out onto the valley floor.

Don tried to catch him, but could not do anything alone, so he rode ahead to the "inn-yurt," where the others had stopped to make lunch, to get the ma-fu and Dunguerbo. Meanwhile I hobbled on to join them. I had a trampled foot, a sore back, and a rotten disposition as a result of the accident. Still, it's an ill wind, etc., because the two hours we wasted gave time for the sandstorm to blow itself out. When we started on again after eating, the clouds

were giving way to a deep blue sky, and sunshine bathed the peaks on either side of the notch.

The dunes on the eastern side of the divide were much easier going down. We stayed aboard our horses on all but the steepest slopes, and slid down. We made such good time that we reached Tömei Temple well before sunset.

We wanted to stay there and take the shortest route back across the desert and the plain, which would mean an easy day's ride. But Dunguerbo objected. There might be water, a swollen branch of the Wu-chia River, or an overfull irrigation ditch across our path. He had an almost irrational fear of water in any form. I shall never forget his amazed expression the next day, when we stopped at our swimming hole on the way back to camp, and plunged in to wash off the dust and grime of travel. He had never seen people swim, and apparently did not know it was possible.

The idea of crossing the plain at an unaccustomed place troubled him as much as the idea of going through the mountains at all had disturbed the ma-fu. The latter was always offering excuses, or even fables, to explain why the passes were impassable, and if it had not been for Dunguerbo we could never have gotten across into the Gobi.

The contrast between Dunguerbo and Hui was always a source of interest to us. Both were young, but their backgrounds and temperaments were entirely different. Dunguerbo was quick and intelligent, and typically Mongol, while Hui was slow and stupid and rather shiftless, a typical border Chinese. The former was fairly well educated, at least by local standards, but the latter could barely scratch the character of his family name, which was in itself an achievement since he had had no schooling at all. They had no common meeting ground except the fact that they were thrown together on our trips, and had a mutual interest in seeing our quaint ways of doing things. They would discuss us delightedly for hours after any exhibition of our customs, such as a meal out of ration tins.

Dunguerbo always looked as though he felt uncomfortable eating Chinese food, especially the overrich feast fare, when we took him to dine with us in Shanpa, but he generally enjoyed our rations. The only things he took exception to were grapefruit juice and canned tomatoes, both of which, he commented wryly, were "too

bitter to take." Hui, on the other hand, was at first sceptical of our rations, but managed to eat them when he could not get anything else. In time he grew to accept them, without ever really liking them. But he always made a face when he was expected to drink the Mongols' tea with its varied contents, and he scorned their cheeses.

Although Hui's job was to care for our horses, he had no feeling for them, sharing the general Chinese contempt for animals as beings of a lower order. He was very casual in caring for our mounts, neglecting to loosen their girths or remove the saddles when we stopped for any length of time, and was even careless about feeding them. Dunguerbo, on the other hand, had a natural fondness for animals and enjoyed caring for them, especially horses and camels. He extended his good nature to animals as to people, and our horses seemed to sense this. He never had any trouble catching and bridling them, as all the Chinese except Lao Tsai did.

When Dunguerbo discouraged us from our plan of returning directly from the pass, we continued on to Borin Temple, where we spent the night. Next day, as we were traveling by way of Beilighe Temple, I decided to push on ahead with Dunguerbo, so I could stop and have a short visit with the abbot, without delaying the others.

On the way we stopped off to see his relatives. Only one yurt was left. His sister had returned to her home outside Shanpa, and his cousins had gone back into the mountains. The only ones still here were his aunt and his eighty-year old maternal grandmother. (His mother was dead).

Dunguerbo's grandmother was a fine old woman, with close-cropped white hair and a creased, leathern face, recalling portraits of Gertrude Stein. When we first saw her, she was sitting on the floor of her yurt beside the hearth, dressed only in goatskin pants and a pair of Mongol boots. She acknowledged my greeting, as Dunguerbo introduced us, with a friendly smile. Then she told her daughter, a middle-aged woman, to get us some food, while she got up to pull on an outer robe.

Dunguerbo talked with her for a while, without translating, probably about us and the trip. Then when she went out for a moment, he explained to me that she was a *shoibwonsh,* a sort of woman-lama. I had heard of these, but never met one. While sanctioned by the Lama Church as witches or seeresses, the elderly

widows who bore this title were, I had been told, actually transmitters of the old folk traditions. They were said to be successors to the shamans, who before the introduction of Lamaism were the spiritual leaders of the Mongol people.

This suggested something; perhaps she could answer a question I had been wondering about.

That night last week, while we were cooking our supper in the herdsman's yurt in Dabatu Pass, I had sat beside the hearth staring absent-mindedly up at the bracing of the smoke hole. The light, circular frame with its eight braces gleamed dully through the smoke in the reflected glare from the fire. Could this, I wondered, have any connection with the eight-spoked Wheel of the Law which we saw so often on the roofs of the temples—not as a symbol of Buddha's teachings, but in its earlier form as the primitive Asiatic symbol of the Sun Wheel? Some modern Mongols, I knew, still explain the wheel flanked by gazelles as a picture of the animals saluting the rising sun. If the smoke-hole bracing in the dome of the tent was thought of as a solar wheel, it was no doubt intended to recall the Sun in the dome of the sky.

I felt sure that this idea must originally have been in the minds of the Nature-worshiping yurt-builders, but the owners of that particular tent had not been able to tell me anything about it. Neither could the lamas I asked. In fact, the latter always acted very superior whenever I brought up the subject of folk beliefs, as though they felt above such superstitions, which did not happen to coincide with their own.

"Only the elders of the black people (the laymen) know that sort of thing," they would say. Here was my opportunity, for Dunguerbo's grandmother was both elderly and a priestess of the old traditions. When she came back, I asked her, through Dunguerbo, about the meaning of the form of the yurt and its smoke hole.

"The tent is the Sky," she said, making a gesture to indicate a covering dome. "The hole in the roof is the Sun in the Sky, the Eye of Heaven, through which comes light," she continued, "and when, in the morning, we use the *chuchilur* (a carved wooden dipper) to pour the tea offering on the hearth iron, the vapor goes up with the smoke to Burkhan (God)."

I realized, of course, that this did not explain why the Mongol yurts are shaped as they are. The early Mongols, or their ancestors,

had no doubt discovered that the domed structure was eminently practical for the tents of plain- or valley-dwellers, as high winds blowing against them would slip harmlessly around the curved sides, whereas a flat-sided tent would be blown in, if not tumbled over. The point is that, having such tents, the Mongols of an earlier age had seen a resemblance to the sky which appears to them as a dome, and thought of their tents as being the Universe in miniature.

This was not all. According to Dunguerbo's grandmother, even the floor under the smokehole carried out the plan of the universe as the Mongols knew it. The small square area marked off by narrow boards around the central hearth she explained as the "square of Earth." She went on to point out how the Mongols have also arranged this floor diagram so that it contains the five elements of old Asiatic tradition: Fire, Metal, Wood, Earth, and Water. The fire burns almost perpetually in the metal grate, and a wooden frame encloses the area of tamped earth around the hearth, while water (or liquid) is present in the kettle or cauldron, either of which is constantly resting on the grate.

This explained why the old metalsmith in Beilighe Pass had a special gadget to knock out his pipe, so he would not have to strike the grate that forms part of the sacred diagram. After this, I noticed that even though most of the modern Mongols seem to have forgotten these old religious associations, they all considered the space enclosed by the wood as strictly taboo, and never set anything inside it, even pots of spare fuel, or wet boots after a storm. The four posts of the grate seem particularly sacred, and nothing can be hung on them or leaned against them.

Whether or not they remembered the meaning of the square around the hearth, all the Mongols we met had the firm conviction that the world is square. When we tried to tell them where America was, we had a hard time explaining how it was not necessarily east or west, but that we could reach home by traveling in either direction. Even Dunguerbo never quite grasped the idea, so he was not much help when we were trying to get it across to others.

I would not dream of challenging his grandmother's belief that her tea sacrifice went up to God in Heaven—probably it does. But I thought that Dunguerbo, as an enlightened youth of the 20th century, should be taught that the world is round and revolves around the sun. Such truths should not interfere with religion, and are basic.

I hoped that I at least planted seeds so that his inquiring mind will not be dulled and stultified by the endless repetition of meaningless phrases that will make up his chief duties as a lama. Perhaps he, and other young Mongols of the present day with their awakening minds, will be the means of reforming the Lama Church, and make it more worthy of its powerful place in Mongol life. It once was, and might again be, a constructive spiritual influence, rather than an economic drain.

After we had some tea, we continued on to Beilighe Temple. The visit was a dismal failure. The monks were all away on one of their tours to another monastery, and the place was closed and deserted. Only a lay caretaker had been left there, and he could not answer my questions.—This tendency to abandon the home temples every few weeks makes a visit to a lamasery something of a gamble. You never can know whether you will be able to get into the shrines once you reach them after a long journey.

Even though we rejoined the others sooner than we expected, the swim delayed us a while, so it was suppertime when we got back to camp. As Dunguerbo would not have time to get home to his sister's before dark, we invited him to spend the night at camp. He stayed with the ma-fus in the stables outside the gate, but came in that evening to visit Fred's room. We fed him from leftover rations, then took him over to the mess hall to hear the phonograph.

He listened entranced to the vocal records, especially those of the Don Cossacks, whose Asiatic melodies must have held special meaning for him even though he could not understand the words. The symphony records, though, merely made him restless, and he did not like the "noise" of American dance music. Even waltzes, he said, left him with an impression of jumbled sounds.

The houseboys, Chinese privates from the Sarachi district of central Suiyuan, tried to crowd into the mess hall, saying that if "that no-account" could come in, they could too. They recognized him as a Mongol by the scarlet vest he wore with his student's uniform—no Chinese would wear anything as bright—and Sa-hsien people, as members of the first wave of Chinese migration into the Mongol grazing lands, are the most open in their scorn of the people they dispossessed.

Their feeling was even more obvious next morning when Fred went to ask the cook for an extra plate of eggs to give Dunguerbo.

"Mongol no good!" the Chinese servants said with emphasis. This annoyed us very much, as Dunguerbo had a far finer personality and a much more generous nature than most of the Chinese we had contact with up there.

He asked us to visit his home south of Shanpa, and we stopped at the big Chinese restaurant in town for lunch on the way. As on other such occasions, he ate little and showed that polite deference toward us which always came out in public, whether in Shanpa or in a lamasery. Although we treated him as an equal, he seemed to feel when others were around that he should be the respectful youngster, never taking advantage of the superior position he held by being able to speak far better Chinese than I, and Mongolian, which none of us Americans knew.

The refugee home of Dunguerbo's sister, to which he and his father had come after fleeing west to escape the Japanese, was a simple adobe hut. It adjoined the temporary wartime barracks of the *Pa Shih-ling,* the Eighth Mongol Cavalry, composed of members of the Eastern Oirat Banner. (The Western Oirats belonged to the Seventh Cavalry, *Ch'i Shih-ling.*) Dunguerbo's brother-in-law, who was a *hya,* or noble of the third rank in this Banner, was also a captain in this cavalry unit. He had gone on to Paotou to join General Fu, leaving his wife and baby daughter, so Dunguerbo and his stepmother had moved in to keep her company. Dunguerbo's father, possibly because he found matrimony a little trying now that he had passed fifty, preferred life in a mountain yurt from which he could get good hunting.

The quarters were very crowded even for Dunguerbo, the two women, and the baby. They consisted of little more than one room, with another half room, entered by a hole in the wall, that was used for storage. The felt on the k'ang-bed was stained and greasy, the walls were as smoke-blackened as the inside of a yurt, and the air was thick with flies.

Dunguerbo's sister looked considerably different in her simple Chinese peasant garb of white jacket and dark-blue trousers. She was still quite pretty, in a Mongol way, but the lack of head ornaments seemed to enhance her olive skin and emphasized the length of her nose, giving her face a rather Semitic cast. While she was making some buttered tea, we asked Dunguerbo to persuade her and her stepmother to put on their Mongol finery for a photograph.

The two women looked a little embarrassed, but after a whispered consultation they told us, through Dunguerbo, that they would be flattered. While his sister poured us tea, the older woman reached into the storage hole and proceeded to dig out a couple of large bundles tied up in old rags, from under a pile of saddles and saddle rugs. When they opened them, out tumbled robes of fine dark serge, short, sleeveless jackets of bright-colored satin with brocaded borders, and pounds of silver jewelry. Again we were impressed, as always, by the contrast of wealth in squalor that seems so typical of Mongol life.

We watched, trying not to stare too rudely, as they donned their heavy head-trappings, looking for the differences between the head-dresses of the Eastern and Western Oirat Banners to which their respective husbands belonged. Both wore swik pendants of almost identical pattern. The principal difference seemed to be in the ornaments they wore on their braids at each side. Dunguerbo's sister, as an Eastern Oirat by marriage, had the ends of her braids stuffed into two flattened spiral boxes of silver set with corals, which were attached by tapes to a coral-studded band of dark cloth that she wore like a coronet. Her stepmother, a Western Oirat, on the other hand, had her braids bound by a pair of slightly curved, boxlike clamps, set with turquoise and coral, such as I had seen worn by Mongol women in the Paotou district some years ago. She was also wearing her bridal crown, a silver skullcap with hinged panels at the front, sides, and back. It looked very heavy.

We had a hard time persuading them to leave off their head cloths. They acted as though they felt undressed without them, but the coverings would have hidden most of the finery.

As the two women posed for Hill in front of the house, nervously adjusting their ornaments and straightening the pendant chains from their swiks and earrings, some Chinese women, wives of local farmers and camp-followers who hung around the barracks, came over to watch. They laughed and made rude remarks at the "barbaric" display, making the two who were being photographed feel very self-conscious about being Mongols and therefore "different."

This was not the first time I had seen examples of what seems almost a determined campaign of derision on the part of the border Chinese. They like to make the Mongols feel that their way of life is ridiculous, and that they must become like the Chinese. If the

Mongols ever do entirely give up their old customs and dress to conform to Chinese ways, much of the color would disappear from the frontier lands of Northeast Asia, and future travelers would then find little to relieve the drabness of the worn-out farmlands and grey deserts.

The Belgian Mission has realized this. Father Ma, the only Mongol to become a priest, told me that in his old home in the northern Ordos almost a thousand Mongol families belong to the Mission. On Sundays and festivals they ride into church with all their finery, the women with their jeweled headdresses and the men with their silver mounted saddles and horse trappings, trying to outrival each other. After Mass, he said, they often have horse races or wrestling matches. In short, the Fathers have skilfully managed to make the Church festivals take the place of the Lama temple fairs, and the mission now takes the place in their social life that the lama-series once held, but they have kept their costume and most of their customs under the new auspices.

Dunguerbo seemed the least disturbed by the remarks of the onlookers; perhaps he was used to them. He scarcely lost his jolly, friendly manner, even though the Chinese gapers followed us back to the house and leaned in through the door and window to stare at us as we finished our tea.

Before we left, Dunguerbo told us about a wonderful temple called Ago-in Sume, southwest of Dabatu Pass. I had been hearing vague references to the place from other Mongols, and knew it must be a very famous shrine. Dunguerbo whetted my curiosity still more by saying that it had not been looted and still had great treasures. Furthermore, no white man had ever seen it.

He had gone there with his father about two months ago to attend an annual festival, and hinted broadly that he would be glad to go there again if we wanted to see it. He had nothing to do, he said, until the Oirat School reopened at Beilighe Temple sometime in October. Of course he did not say that he would be glad to make a trip to get away from these squalid surroundings, but I imagine that had something to do with it.

The idea of seeing Ago-in Sume appealed to me strongly, but we had only just returned from a long trip and it was too soon to think about another. As we left, I told him we would keep it in mind.

17

THE JOURNEY TO AGO-IN SUME

SEPTEMBER dragged on with still no new part for the truck, and reports from the south told of lingering floods and impassable roads. Two or three members of the camp got orders to go north and east in an effort to reach Peking, but the rest were still there, and morale, if anything, was worse. Finally, toward the end of the month, I decided to take advantage of Dunguerbo's offer to guide us to Ago-in Sume, and asked Fred, the magician, and Walter Hill if they would care to come along.

The trip began badly. The day we set out the weather changed. It was very cold and the sky was heavily overcast. Furthermore, Hui had just been recalled to join General Fu's cavalry in Paotou, so we had to take another, less reliable, ma-fu. He took a long time to catch and saddle our horses, and we were late in starting.

As soon as we left camp, I cut off across country to Dunguerbo's house to collect him, while the other three rode into Shanpa, and out by the Southwest Road. Before I reached his house, it began to rain and the wind blew even colder. I thought the trip was doomed.

Luckily, Dunguerbo said he didn't mind bad weather. He searched in the storeroom for his sheepskin overcoat-sleeping-bag, while his sister made me some buttered tea. When I told them that Hui had gone on to Paotou, which is near Dunguerbo's old home, the latter sighed enviously.

"Ayah!" he exclaimed, "a ma-fu's life is a good one!" Then he asked, very practically, if our new ma-fu liked Mongols. I did not know, but as it turned out they got along quite well.

When we set out to join the others, I slung Dunguerbo's heavy coat across my saddlebow, and he climbed up behind me. This was not successful, as the dangling sleeves made the horse nervous and he started to bolt. When I reined him in, Dunguerbo dismounted and put on the coat. Then he hopped up behind me again, and we started down the Southwest Road.

As the others had never been over the road, I had suggested for our meeting place, the buildings nearest to Dunguerbo's house. These were a couple of small one-room noodleshops, the Chinese equivalents of our hot-dog stands, that faced each other across the highway near a prominent irrigation ditch. I thought our companions could easily find the food shops because of their traditional signs, the pairs of wooden hoops with dangling red streamers. As luck would have it, the proprietors had not yet hung them out for the day, and Fred and Hill, together with the ma-fu, had ridden on past them for miles.

We did not catch up with them until noon, at a big town called Mi-ts'ang. They were waiting at a restaurant with a particularly flamboyant pair of food signs, beside a small river. Fred had already managed to order a few dishes by the simple expedient of sketching a pig and a hen laying eggs, so I just ordered us a couple more.

The meal was delicious, one of the best I have ever had in China. The only hitch was that the cook had an artist's temperament. With the rare opportunity of displaying his talents to visiting foreigners—the first he had seen outside of the Belgian missionaries—he could not be rushed. We lost two hours more there.

Shortly after leaving the inn we saw a chorten in the distance, and then a couple of graceful Chinese roofs surmounting Tibetan-style temple halls. It was obviously a large monastery. Dunguerbo said that it was the original Meirin Lamasery, from which had stemmed the new Meirin Temple we had recently seen in the mountains.

When we reached it, we found an outer mud wall of recent construction, over which peered the roofs of adobe barracks. I feared the worst, but reality exceeded the expectation. It was now a Chinese military school for the sons of landlords and officials. Every hall and outbuilding of the original temple had been gutted. The only furniture remaining was in the monastery library, where an ornate gilded bookcase, with individual compartments for the 108 volumes of the Kangyur, stood empty and forlorn above a pile of rotting cabbages, stored there for the students' food.

Above the door of the main hall, set aside for a Nationalist shrine to Sun Yat-sen and a lecture hall, was a large character-board with the Chinese Nationalist motto, "Propriety, Loyalty, Equality, and

Conscience (or Sense of Shame)." The third word, Equality, certainly could not apply to the Chinese attitude toward the Mongols, and I wondered if any of the students felt a sense of shame at the way the local Chinese had treated the Mongols, and this, their former shrine. I was sure they did not, when I saw the contemptuous way they looked at Dunguerbo.

Other Chinese I have spoken to, before and since, explained away the confiscation of a lamasery on the edge of the Chinese farming lands (actually this temple was in a small desert and the land around it was useless) by saying that the lama religion is corrupt, and a bad influence on all its worshipers, and deserves to be driven out anyhow, so it is no crime to put its temples to better use.

It is true that many of the lama monks are dissolute, and that the religion itself contains degenerate elements. All old religions tend to become corrupt when the first fires of truth begin to burn out and negative influences assert themselves. But even at this stage, some of the truth remains, and the religion as a social force still has great importance for the community as a whole. This is especially true for people like the Mongols and Tibetans, who live by their religion to an extent hard for an Occidental to understand. In addition, the temples are important to them as centers of their social life, the meeting places for all their festivals.

As I have suggested, Lamaism is a foreign thing for the Mongols. It is a comparatively recent borrowing, having been introduced only about three hundred years ago, which is a relatively short period in Asia's long history. But in that space of time, it has absorbed so many of their deepest traditional beliefs, and has become such a fixed part of their life, that if it were to be suddenly abolished by outside pressure much of the basic culture of the Mongols would vanish with it.

We continued on past the temple along the road. The map showed the road as leading from Shanpa to Dabatu Pass, but it did not seem to be getting any nearer to the mountains. It was almost evening when we found out from a herdsman that it did not go to the pass at all. We immediately left the road and struck off across country toward the pass, which we could now see clearly, although it was still about ten miles to the west of us.

Sunset found us well beyond the farming country, but completely fouled up in a morass of dunes and marshes, alternating with broad

pools of tainted water—Dunguerbo's dreaded water. We could see why he disliked it, but I suspect that his feeling on this occasion was due to more than the inconvenience. It seemed to border on panic. No doubt it was the mysterious quality of an unfamiliar element, made more fearsome by the darkness and the explosions of wild fowl —ducks and geese in large flocks—which burst up out of the marsh everywhere, practically under our horses' hoofs.

When we finally floundered up out of the marshes into the desert proper, we were grateful for Dunguerbo's mountain sense that enabled him to recognize the notch of the pass leading to Borin Temple, in the dark profile of the range against the evening sky. After a couple of more weary miles across the sand, in the face of an autumn gale blowing down off the mountains, we made the pass and soon we reached the temple. Everybody had already turned in, but we roused one of the lamas and got a room for the night.

We slept quite late next morning and the sun was already fairly high when we set out again. Passing some semipermanent Mongol houses of the type called *beishin,* near the mouth of the pass, we stopped for some photographs of the occupants, particularly a woman with a fine headdress. Then we went on down the plain, and turned south, following the range.

After some miles we came opposite Dabatu Pass, through which we had crossed into the Gobi. We paused to admire the contrast of purple rock and drifted yellow sand that distinguished this pass from all the others we had seen. It appeared rather low to us through the clear air. We always found it hard to judge heights and distances in this region, but this time we knew from experience that the pass was a great deal higher than it looked.

For at least an hour we rode up and down over high dunes made by sand from the Gobi blown down through the pass. Then, from the arid desert, we came abruptly to a shallow lagoon that stretched for several miles ahead of us, approaching close to the range. Only a few hundred yards separated the water from the base of the mountains, but this was carpeted with grass and bushes. Here some Chinese camel owners had pastured their animals to fatten them for the winter's work, when the local grain would be carried south to Ninghsia, Lanchow, or even Sian. Even though the camels themselves were at some distance, the stench of the ground in several places where they had lain for some time was terrific.

I noticed a considerable salt deposit around the edges of the lagoon, which had been left after some of the water had evaporated, and asked Dunguerbo where the camels got their water.

"They drink that," he said, "it doesn't matter." Camels must indeed be strange animals, we thought.

At noon we came to T'ai-yang Miao, once a large lama temple, now completely in ruins. Not long ago the Chinese had completely destroyed it to punish the lamas for "lack of cooperation." I had heard something about their harboring a small advance patrol of Japanese who had come down through the passes from the Gobi.

The main hall at the base of the mountain was an empty shell, full of scattered bricks from the upper coping. Not a trace of any contents remained. Far more depressing was what had once been a handsome cave-temple, partway up the cliff above. On the floor we found shattered remnants of fine woodwork and plaster images, and in a nook at one side that once housed a special shrine, countless paintings, books, and manuscripts had been burned. The smoke of them had blackened the white stone of the ceiling all the way out to the entrance.

The sight depressed Dunguerbo. He said that it made him sick, but when I told him the story of the Japanese patrol—which he had never heard—he admitted that there may have been some provocation. We, too, felt that this thorough and complete destruction seemed a needless display of Chinese power. We were all glad to push on.

Rounding a steep cliff promontory that marked the end of this projecting section of the range, we rode across more desert. Here the caravan trail that we were following was marked for winter camel drivers by small cairns of red and grey boulders. My horse was a gentle buckskin which I had chosen for his tireless pacing because it was easier on my back. Unfortunately, however, he was inclined to shy at anything unusual. Haystacks, oxcarts, and large boulders were his chief obsessions, but today he added cairns to the list. The sudden jolts caused by his shying were almost as hard on my still sore back as a constant trot would have been.

As a matter of fact, the cairns were hardly needed. For the bleached bones of horses and camels who had died on the winters' march, picked clean by wolves, lined the caravan trail on both sides, plainly marking the route.

To continue our bad luck of yesterday, the bright sunshine of this morning, which we had hoped meant a new spell of clear weather, gave way to dark clouds that hung heavy around the peaks. Soon it began to pour, in gusty squalls of hard-driven, ice-cold rain. The horses plodded on stolidly with hanging heads, and we, wrapped in our blankets but getting wetter and wetter, were drooped over our saddles like individual replicas of "Lo, the poor Indian."

To our left Dunguerbo pointed out a wide, deep pass which he called Haron-in Gol (T'ai-yang Miao Hsi-k'ou, in Chinese). This, he told me, split the range neatly in half and was much better than Dabatu Pass, since it had an easy grade without dunes. He explained that he had not brought us through here on our way to Shanda-in Temple because it was a much longer route and we had said we were pressed for time. It would have added at least a day to the trip each way.

At the mouth of the pass, where the junction of the main valley and a side one isolated a high terrace, we saw a high wall, made of well-fitted stones. It was all that remained of an extensive village-fortress that had guarded this important pass in times gone by. On the return trip, when the weather was more conducive to digressions, I turned aside to explore the space within the walls.

Along with many pieces of broken porcelain and some small bits of rusty iron from a recent period, I found one piece of prehistoric pottery and a flint implement, where winds and rain had eroded the soil to a deeper level. Obviously this site was a very old one, and had been occupied for centuries—since the Stone Age. I would like to be able to report the discovery of a Nestorian inscription, or at least one of their bronze crosses, in order to follow in the great tradition of travelers who explored other parts of Inner Mongolia. But I had no such luck.

About half a mile beyond the pass, a long terrace projected into the plain as an extension of the range. On its northern end stood a giant cairn in the shape of an enormous Mongol tent—*ger-öbö,* Dunguerbo called it—and in the far distance, somewhat hazy through the rain, we saw another. Between them was the gap that marked the opening of the gorge in which our temple stood.

Dunguerbo had said that Ago-in Sume, and indeed the whole gorge, was a particularly sacred place to the Mongols, who came here in immense groups during the sixth and tenth months of their calen-

dar—our July and November. Its sanctity was immediately apparent to us when we passed a sharp rock about thirty feet high, at the entrance of the gorge. When the river was in flood it must have formed an island. It was hung with *katagh* scarfs and strings of shoulder bones of sheep. I noticed that the latter were inscribed with *Om mani padme hum,* and Dunguerbo explained that this prayer was supposed to be broadcast when they clattered in the wind.

The gorge was very impressive, though still low compared to the towering range ahead. The red and purple colors of its rocks seemed very beautiful, in so far as we could appreciate any beauty then. We were wet to the bone, shivering with cold, and hoping that the next turn would bring us to the temple. But turn followed turn, and we soon found ourselves deep in the range itself. The gorge had narrowed sharply and the red mountains rose sheer on both sides. In places the rock walls had close strata of different colors that had been weirdly distorted in places by ancient pressure. It reminded us of wood grain on a gigantic scale.

Finally, at a particularly narrow turn we came to a row of prayer flags fluttering from a string that extended from wall to wall. This was a sacred barrier to keep out demons. Just beyond was the main temple rising from a cluster of residence buildings. It was rather small, newly painted in white and grey, with the red stripe around the top. On the roof gleamed the Wheel and gazelles and the usual finials. They looked very yellow. Indeed, we found they were solid gold. This was the fabulously rich Ago-in Sume.

18

TEMPLE OF THE ANTELOPE CAVE

WE WERE hospitably greeted by a handsome young lama named Oiruk, the host monk of Ago-in Sume. He showed us into the vast guest courtyard in a group of buildings across the way from the main temple. Here three yurts were set up, and he took us into the largest of these, a reception tent. He seated us on throne cushions, and brought us tea with millet and bread sticks.

We would much rather have taken time out to change our clothes first. But we had to take some tea, exchange snuff bottles with the host monk and others, and present kataghs, before politeness permitted us to think of comfort. Finally we were able to break away to the smaller yurt where we were to sleep, and had a chance to put on dry things. Then we returned to the reception tent to dine more fully.

Four or five monks looked on curiously as we ate, and from a corner near the door, two pairs of eyes stared at us from under the lowered, dark blue headcloths of two women. Dunguerbo whispered that they were Alashans, and that this temple belonged to the Alashan Banner, a fact which kept him from feeling completely at home.

I looked closely to see how their headdresses differed, and finally one of them moved forward nearer the fire and drew back her headcloth, disclosing the swik on one side. Like those worn by the Oirat women, it consisted of a large silver hoop with a jeweled front panel and a pendant. The front panel was much narrower on this Alashan swik, however, and was set with smaller stones, while the pendant consisted of only one line of corals and lacked the ornamental box below. In fact, it looked more like a misplaced earring. Then it dawned on me: for the first time I realized that the swiks must originally have been earrings, but with the desire to display more wealth in stones, they had grown impractically large to hang from the ears, so the Mongol women had been forced to adopt this way of wearing them.

After dinner Oiruk took us up to visit the abbot, who lived in a small, beautifully appointed cottage further up the gorge. He was a grossly fat man, rather tall for a Mongol, with small pigs' eyes and heavy jowls. He examined us shrewdly as we entered the room and smiled expansively when I presented him with a roll of figured satin. Through Dunguerbo, I addressed to him a few polite remarks, which he answered rather noncommittally. His eyes narrowed when he spoke, and all the while he tenderly caressed his right knee with a fat and flabby hand. Then as the interview began to bore him, he motioned languidly to an obsequious lama attendant, who quickly brought us a katagh from a lacquered chest as a sign that we were dismissed.

On returning to our yurt, we looked at the scarf, and found it old and frayed. Dunguerbo said that it was an insult to give one in such condition. The host monk, looking on, made an exclamation of disgust which Dunguerbo translated as "Just like him!" and went off to get a good one of his own which he exchanged for the abbot's, to erase the breach of hospitality.

We shivered through the night on the floor of the sleeping yurt in damp and inadequate blankets, even though we were fully dressed. Wintry gusts roared down the gorge all night long, making weird moaning sounds. It was already October, and the storm of the afternoon had brought very cold weather in its wake. We were grateful for the practical shape of the tent, as the savage winds passed harmlessly around the smooth curves of its sides and dome, though we wished the felt were a little thicker. A square tent could never have survived those onslaughts.

We were wakened next morning after fitful slumber by a chorus of barking from the monastery dogs, who were serenading an early morning departure. The sounds echoed and re-echoed in the narrow gorge. This was followed shortly by several foghorn blasts of the conch-shell trumpets, calling worshipers to prayer. Once more the dogs began barking, as the courtyards stirred into morning activity.

Almost all day long the dogs found something to bark at. This is true of most lamaseries, but here it was so much more noticeable because of the way the gorge affected the sound. For a wealthy monastery, the dogs were more than usually ill-fed, and their dispositions proportionately worse. Perhaps this was done on purpose to make them better watchdogs, but it left them with little spirit. They

snarled malignantly with fangs bared at every passer-by, but their yellow slit eyes closed and they turned their heads away when anyone looked directly at them.

In appearance they were mostly black, with tan and white markings on paws, chests, and over the eyes, and they had the size and general build of Eskimo Huskies, to which they are closely related. As yet they had not gotten their new winter coats, while lumps of last year's still clung to their hind quarters, matted with dirt and burrs. They looked to us only one stage better than the naked dogs of southern China, who have lost all their hair from mange.

After we had had a simple breakfast of millet congee, an aging monk with a broad smiling face, set off by a straggling grey moustache, came in and offered to show us the sights of the temple. He led us first up a steep rock-cut stairway carved from the cliff face behind our guest quarters. After about three hundred feet, the stone balustrade on the outside gave way to one of lacquered wood which supported a row of brass prayer wheels. Our guide scraped against them with his elbow, setting them all spinning, as he passed. This brought us to a stone platform opening into a vast cavern.

"This is the *Löwung Chim,* the Antelope Cave," announced our guide, in Chinese and Tibetan.

The Antelope Cave! I had also heard about this from the lamas, but had not realized that it was at Ago-in Sume. It is one of the most sacred places of the Mongol people. They had considered it sacred long before they were converted to Lamaism, even before their ancestors had been known as "Mongols." No one knew how long this had been a holy place.

It was very dark inside, and the air was already heavy with the smoke of incense. Leading back from the doorway we could make out lines of prayer benches, indicating that this served as a regular temple. As our eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, we saw at the far end the dull gleam of gold in a dark shrine.

We went forward and came to a great block of stone, forming a platform for the offerings. These were mostly *torma* cakes shaped from dough and water, or in some cases dough and blood. Beside these was a cup made of the top of a human skull, with a turquoise-studded band of silver around it, and a beautifully wrought golden lid. Most of the accessory ornaments were of gold or silver instead of the usual brass.

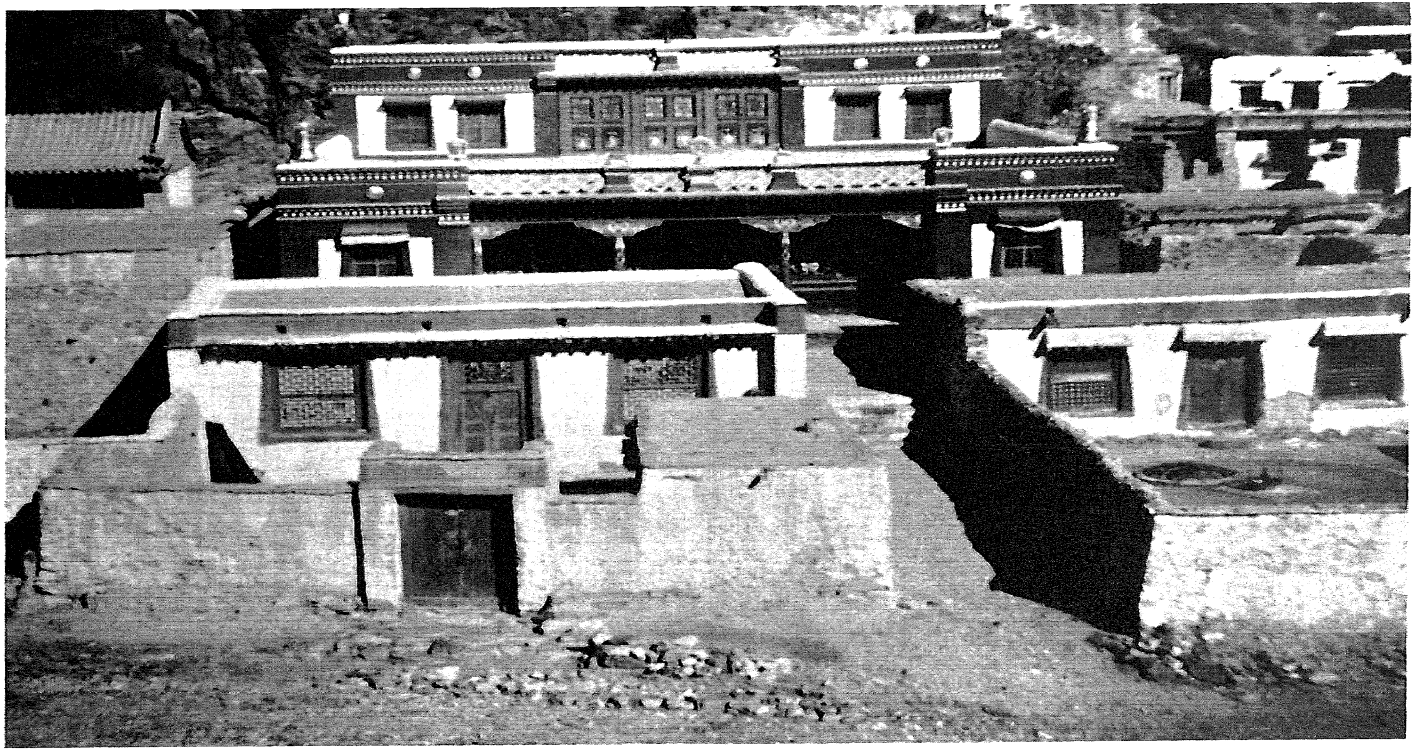
Behind this was another great block of stone serving as a base for the main shrine. On it was the image of Padma Sambhava, who had introduced Lamaism to Tibet in the 8th century and founded the Red Sect. His image was flanked by two smaller ones representing his wives. Except for their heads, the three figures were wrapped in rich brocade, but from what we could see they appeared to be real gold, not merely gilded. It was the golden face of the central image that I had seen gleaming from the rear of the cave.

The shrine was set well out in the cave, so people could walk around it—clockwise—and thus acquire merit. A Mongol couple were circling it as we stood there, mumbling their prayers with bowed heads. As a final act of devotion, on the last time around, they each flung a silken scarf over a wire strung across the front of the shrine below the images.

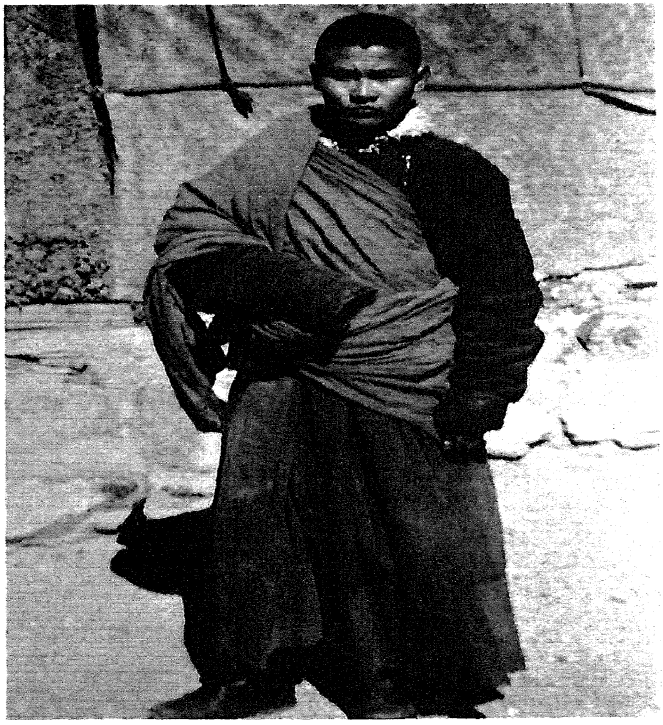
As we stood there, more lamas came in. Some sat on the prayer benches, while others lit more incense. The smoke billowed upward, increasing the murk. Through it the golden images continued to gleam, though more dully. The monks chanted and the temple drums boomed, while great gusts from the peaks roared past the opening, at times drowning out all other sounds. The combination of the rich treasures, the incense-scented murk, and the rhythmic droning of the prayers, together with the sound of the elements outside combined to make an experience none of us will ever forget. Our scalps tingled with a sense of awe, and we felt as the Mongols did, that this was indeed a holy place.

When we came out, I commented to our guide about the beautiful things of gold, and said I thought the temple was indeed fortunate to have such wealth in these times. He replied that it was the only one over a very wide area that had not been looted by the Chinese. Though he knew a little of the Chinese language, he obviously detested the people who persecuted his religion, and said vehemently that they never allowed Chinese to come there, much less enter their holy places. He explained that they only tolerated the ma-fu because he was with us, and thanked me for sending him off early to graze the horses, thus getting him out of the way before we asked to see the temples.

The lamas here were probably afraid of Chinese spies who might report their wealth and return with a bandit horde. I could not see that they had very much to fear, however, because it was easy to see



The main temple at Ago-in Sume.
(*Photo by W. E. Hill.*)



Oiruk, the host monk, at the door of our yurt.

Dunguerbo's courtesy-aunt, the *Shoibwonsh*, with her grandson.

(*Photos by W. E. Hill.*)

that they could stand off an army with a few riflemen well placed in the caves above the narrow entrance gorge. In fact, we were sure that they must have had guards stationed in the gorge when we came in, because they seemed prepared for our coming before we arrived.

We returned to the valley floor to visit the main temple halls, and I was surprised to find that these were also dedicated to Padma Sambhava. To find these temples of the Yellow Sect dedicated to the founder of the rival Red Sect was something of a shock. It was almost as inappropriate as an Episcopal Church dedicated to St. Ignatius Loyola.

Brightly painted pictures along the walls showed how Padma Sambhava had been miraculously born from a flaming lotus—hence his name which means the "Lotus-born"—and how he had come from India to Tibet. By using the magical practices that decaying Buddhism had borrowed from the Hindus, to subdue the native gods and demons of Tibet, he had succeeded in introducing Buddhism where others had failed. After forcing the Tibetans to acknowledge the power of the foreign faith, he managed to achieve an acceptable compromise by retaining the native deities as lesser demons and guardian spirits of Lamaism. This accounts for much of the demon-worship in the modern faith.

Along with the good in Buddhist philosophy, Padma Sambhava also brought in much evil, in the form of sexual and magical practices which Indian Buddhism on its downward grade had picked up from other, more mysterious cults. As Lamaism became worse and worse in Tibet, various reformers sprang up to try to correct its excesses. The last and greatest of these was Tsong Kapa, who founded the Yellow Sect. This, too, is now as degenerate as the Red Sect was at its worst, and just as urgently needs new reformers if it is to survive.

The night before, we had tried to see the Living Buddha of this temple, whose name I now found was Löwung Chimba, "the Lord of the Antelope Cave," but we were told he had gone to bed. This morning, when we tried again, after visiting the temples, the attendants said he was out. Meanwhile we saw portraits of his predecessor surrounded by six earlier incarnations, all wearing hats like that traditionally worn by Padma Sambhava alone, but in yellow instead of red. This aroused my suspicions that the Living Buddha of Ago-

in Sume was the reincarnation of Padma Sambhava himself, though it seemed almost impossible that a member of the Yellow sect would claim any relationship to the chief member of the rival Red Sect.

It took two days to find the answer, because Dunguerbo did not understand the Chinese word for "reincarnation" that I used in requesting him to ask the lamas from whom their Living Buddha was reincarnated. Finally I found a monk who knew enough Chinese to give me the answer. The Living Buddha was indeed Padma Sambhava reborn; as if the late Bishop Manning had been the reborn soul of Ignatius Loyola!

When this astounding fact was admitted, I made a more determined effort to meet the Living Buddha before we left. Under this pressure the host monk made the pathetic admission that he was very ill with an unknown sickness, but they had been trying to conceal the fact. Though he did not say as much, I assumed they felt that it was inappropriate for a great sorcerer not to be able to keep himself well, or at least to be unable to cure himself when he became sick. Oiruk told Dunguerbo that he would probably consent to see us if we insisted, but we did not want to disturb an invalid, and left reluctantly on the third day without having met this lama curiosity.

19

LAST DAYS IN SHANPA

AS WE RODE back from Ago-in Sume, the Temple of the Antelope Cave, it was still very cold, though a change of wind made the plain seem somewhat warmer than the mountains had been. We had lunch in the ruins of T'ai-yang Miao, and spent the night at the house of a courtesy-aunt of Dunguerbo's who lived near Borin Temple. She, too, was a lama-witch, or shoibwonsh, like Dunguerbo's grandmother, though not nearly as old a woman, and in the course of conversation with her I learned some more of the old Mongol traditions.

On the second day, we almost immediately reached the farm land, and rode cross country by cart tracks, instead of merely skirting it along the Southwest Road. It now looked very bleak. That first night at the temple, October 1st, when it had seemed so cold, the plain had had an unusually heavy frost. The first ones, in September, had all been light and had not done any special harm, but this frost had killed all the plants. We noticed one pathetic case where a farmer had risked planting most of his land in cotton. The season had been too short, and the plants were killed when the bolls had barely begun to form. He was probably ruined.

Everywhere people were getting in the rest of the harvest, mostly soybeans. Women and children and very old men were cutting the stalks and piling them into ox carts to take back to their farmyards, where they could thresh out the beans. We saw no able-bodied men; they were all off with General Fu's army in the east of the province.

Many fields were already bare and quite a number were flooded, making a haven for huge flocks of unbelievably tame wild ducks, geese, and demoiselle cranes. The latter were very large grey-blue birds with arching black tail plumes. They had a very fastidious way of walking, picking up their feet very daintily and waggling their black bustles. They let us get very close before pulling in their feet and spreading their enormous wings to fly away.

The ma-fu, who was a farmer's son, explained that they flooded the fields in the fall so that the ground would freeze and retain the water. Then in spring, when the ice melted, there would not only be a lot of moisture on the surface, but the ground would also be soft and partially broken, easier to work with simple tools.

We had to make several long detours because of all the water, but we got to camp that night.

They had good news for us. The clutch plate had just arrived, and when one more technicality was completed, we would be free to go south. The Chinese general at camp still had to sign papers of acceptance for the equipment we had brought from Chungking, and he was still stalling. Our C.O. thought it might delay us a week or two more.

In the meantime, I rode out with the camp doctor one day when he went to call on a wealthy landlord whose mother had trachoma. His name was Li, and the fellows in camp called him "Black Forest Li," because he had a heavy grove of poplars near his "castle," and the name "Farmer Li" had already been given to another landowner.

While the doctor was looking at his mother, our host told me that his father had come from Shansi province about forty years ago, during a famine. He was converted to Catholicism, and took over a large tract of land with the encouragement of the Belgian priests. His holdings now totaled about a thousand *mou* (350 acres), with thirty tenants and their families to help work it. The tenants had small plots of their own, but were supposed to spend the greater part of their time tending his fields.

When the doctor had finished his examination, Mr. Li took us up into his watchtower to show us the view. It was built into a corner of the wall and had very thick walls of its own, making it a stronghold in itself. It was so arranged that even if bandits broke into the courtyard through the outer wall, or through the gate, the family could climb up into an inner room in its second story, pulling up the ladder behind them, and bolting the iron-bound trap door which was thick enough to stop the average Chinese bullet.

He showed us the view of the mountains, then pointed to his fields and sighed. General Fu's recent forced draft had taken all but five of his tenants, he said. How could he possibly get in all his crops with so few hands; and how could he thresh the grain that was already

stacked high around his threshing yard? He was sure he would lose heavily.

This disaster was the last in a long chain of troubles that were fairly typical for this region. In 1926 the bandits had driven off all his herds, and for the next five years had terrorized his family and his tenants so that they were almost afraid to venture out of doors.

Even greater was the terror within his home when General Fu moved west during the War, and quartered in this "castle" a detachment of troops that had till recently been professional bandits. The looting of the place was fully as thorough as it would have been had his lodgers still been practicing their old trade, though perhaps it was more gradual. Three years ago they had been recalled, and the crops since then had begun to make good his losses. But now with this year's most promising crop facing ruin for lack of hands, he feared that he would be worse off than ever.

He seemed surprisingly cheerful in spite of it, looking forward to better times following the peace—if civil war could be avoided, we assumed, though the country people up here never brought up the subject. Only the military seemed to be looking forward to a fight.

He was resigned to the fact that he probably would not be able to keep his tenants when they got out of the army. In the old days, before this war, tenants with military training often became bandits; though national reconstruction would now probably give them better opportunities in more legitimate activities elsewhere. Or was he again thinking about the spread of communism?

In any case, he was interested in finding ways to farm his lands with fewer men, and he asked me about American methods of agriculture. I told him that as far as I knew, our plows and harrows were heavy and cut deep, so deep that the thin layer of topsoil hereabouts would soon be loosened to blow away. He was set aback for a moment. He had been thinking about mechanization, he said, ever since another American officer from Shanpa had told him of our methods the year before.

Then with quick presence of mind, he asked me about farming in the dry areas of America. Certainly we must have places like this dry plain. How did we handle the problem of drifting sands; and what crops did we raise in areas of thin topsoil? I was somewhat at a loss—as always when an educated Chinese, admitting that we as a nation are masters of technology, expected us as individuals to be

masters of all scientific knowledge. I simply told him that I didn't really know, but that I did know that when some of our farmers had ploughed up a vast area of grazing land for wheat, they got a dust bowl.

He began to lose interest in mechanical farming, and I was glad. We had passed the hovels of his tenants on our way here. Now they lived in squalor, but if he introduced machines, they would not have even that. The economic consequences would be appalling.

While we were up on the tower roof he pointed out some of the passes, including one just north of Beilighe Pass, which he said was a much easier one, and had a temple in it. The name he gave to it was one I had heard Dunguerbo mention as being one of the better Oirat temples. As the latter had described it, it was not in a pass, but just beyond one, in the edge of the Gobi.

Of course this aroused my interest, and as the weather seemed to have turned warmer, bringing a hazy Indian Summer, I thought it might be possible to make one more week-end jaunt to see it. The C.O. and another officer had mentioned wanting to see the Gobi, and perhaps get a little hunting on the way, and this would give them that opportunity. They were quite enthusiastic about the idea when I broached it to them, but another cold snap on Saturday morning made them lose interest in it. I planned to go alone the following day, since I had already asked Dunguerbo to come to camp and be our guide.

Then, as a bombshell, the Chinese general, who was always suspicious of our actions, issued an order that if any Americans left camp he must take along a Chinese interpreter for "security." These "interpreters," or "translation officers" as they were literally called, were a shifty lot. With two exceptions, their English was terrible, and their chief function was to report back to the Secret Police agency in Chungking full details of all our activities, personal and otherwise —as another officer at camp had just learned to his sorrow. I did not relish the company of one, and I knew that the presence of a Chinese of this type would effectively prevent me from making the acquaintance of any new Mongols. They certainly would not offer me the usual hospitality if I came with such a person.

I went to the general and explained that as I spoke Chinese and would have a Chinese-speaking Mongol companion, I didn't need another interpreter as well. He insisted—falsely, we later discovered

—that the order had come from Chungking, to protect us against the Chinese Communists who, he said, were beginning to filter into this region. I began to see one of his intentions for the order. He was rabidly anti-Communist and was always trying to emphasize the danger of the Chinese Communists to China now, and ultimately to America as well. If he could persuade us that we were personally in danger from them, he would have gone far toward rousing us against them. In my case, he probably also had a second reason—a desire to see what I was doing among the Mongols. For none of the Chinese believed my sincere assertion that I was interested in studying the life of the people. In any case, he insisted that without an interpreter I could not go to the mountains.

I reported this to Dunguerbo, who was quite upset. He said that he could not possibly take a Chinese officer to the Oirat temple I had proposed visiting, as we would be very unwelcome. In view of this, I decided to give up the longer trip and just make a day's jaunt to Beilighe Temple for my last expedition. The Beilighe lamasery was not a very impressive one compared to several we had since seen—it was not even as well-equipped as its much smaller neighbors, the Meirin and Dungsher temples—but its abbot, Löpön Dorje, was one of the finest lamas I had met, and I wanted one last talk with him to ask him some questions about lama beliefs that were still puzzling me.

When I suggested this, Dunguerbo felt a little better about it, but he still looked dubious at the idea of traveling with a Chinese officer. He was not usually very anti-Chinese—not at all, compared to most Mongols—but he had had an unpleasant experience on his way to camp. He had been stopped outside of Shanpa by some Chinese soldiers who had handled him roughly and questioned him closely about where he was going. Before letting him go they had threatened him and taken away some of the presents he was bringing us.

As we started out next morning, Dunguerbo did not look very well, and he soon complained of a headache from the cold, so I let him go back to camp. This would mean that I could not learn very much from the abbot of Beilighe, whose Chinese was very limited. But I decided to push on, if only because the interpreter did not like the cold, either. It was a freezing day.

As a last straw—as if one were needed—the Wu-chia River had risen in flood and overflowed its banks for a considerable distance

at the crossing we had hoped to make. We rode for miles, sloshing through flooded fields and marsh, looking for another place to cross. We found none, and never got to the mountains.

This was certainly discouraging, but the trip was such a complete fiasco that it seemed almost funny. Frustration after frustration had ended by my taking one of the interpreters on a wild-goose chase from which he would take long to recover. At least it ended the interpreter-guard problem. No one ever said anything about having to take one on leaving camp again. Moreover, it gave me a better perspective, making me grateful for all the expeditions that had worked out. As we rode back to camp, cold and dejected, I realized how fortunate we had been the other times, and resigned myself to sit quietly in camp until things were settled with the general, so we could leave for China, on our way home.

When we got back to camp in midafternoon, in a frozen state, we found it a beehive of activity. A dispatch had come at noon saying that an American plane was making a special trip to Shanpa. It was arriving in a few hours, and would be able to take back about a dozen passengers if they were ready.

Shekalus (my driver) and I, together with two or three others from our original group, had to stay to get the truck back; but three of my party, including Walter Hill, had enough points for immediate discharge, so I let them go. They quickly packed, along with nine men from the regular camp personnel. Then they all broke out the *pai-chiu* for a farewell binge. Soon another dispatch came saying that the plane was almost due to land. So we all piled into the camp truck—those about to leave, and the rest of us to see them off—and set out for "Shanpa Airfield," a strip of pasture on the other side of town.

The sun had already set and it was beginning to get dark when we finally heard the sound of a plane. Being a large Army transport plane, it made considerable noise. Then we sighted it. It passed over Shanpa, circled, and then turned to head south again.

A groan went up from the would-be passengers. At the suggestion of the C.O., we quickly gathered brush and made a series of fires, while the driver of the truck turned on its headlights and maneuvered it so that they shone the length of the field. For a few hectic moments the plane seemed to be continuing on. Then the pilot spotted our lights and circled to make a fine landing.

The pilot explained that his map showed a railroad from Paotou extending past Shanpa, and when they failed to find one, they were starting to head back for Sian to try again next day. Now that they had landed, considering the condition of the field, he thought it better to spend the night there and take off in the morning. Accordingly, we all piled into the truck again, with the plane's pilot and crew and a very agreeable colonel who had come along as passenger, stopping in Shanpa for a very raucous feast as a continuation of the farewell party.

At noon the next day we saw the plane off, and when we got back to camp we found the Chinese general in such good humor from the compliments of the American colonel that he agreed to sign the final papers, releasing us to begin the trip south. Meanwhile, the last problem, lack of gas, was solved when the C.O. offered us enough drums for the trip down to Sian, on condition that we would help him by taking down a truckload of unused supplies and equipment that he and the supply officer had been ordered to return to Chungking.

I would have liked to start next morning, but that was the Double Tenth, China's Independence Day, and the local officials had invited all the Americans to come to the annual celebration in Shanpa. For reasons of "face" we could not leave before that. We began to load the truck for departure the day after, and Fred and I, after packing, took a cross-country ride to Dunguerbo's sister's house to say goodbye to him and his family.

The morning of the Double Tenth (10th of October), we drove to Shanpa under ceremonial arches, made by despoiling what few evergreens grew locally of all their foliage. The town was packed. Landlords and tenant-farmers, sheep-raisers and caravan drivers, were all there in their best clothes. Only the Mongols were conspicuously absent. The year before, we had heard, very many of them had turned out for the celebrations, as their various princes and rulers who were refugees in Shanpa were expected to attend to show their loyalty. This year, when attendance was on a voluntary basis, none came.

In one section of town a street had been roped off for races by the school children, but none of them were natural athletes and their showing was not impressive. In the center of town, the market had spilled over into the side alleys, and a milling crowd of prospective

buyers were eyeing the enlarged displays of Japanese cloth—now confiscated, rather than smuggled; cheap manufactured gadgets, probably from the same source; and secondhand goods of all descriptions and every stage of decay.

On a temporary stage in a square near the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, a troupe of amateur actors, in false beards and gold-embroidered dragon robes, were giving a traditional Chinese play. They did quite well considering the restlessness of the audience, which came and went at will and kept up a steady hum of conversation, drowning out the shrill singing of the players.

In the Memorial Hall itself, the local officials had arranged a display of agricultural products in the old U.S. county fair tradition, offering prizes to the largest pumpkins, the fattest squash, the biggest ear of corn, etc. It was surprising to see how many types of grain and vegetables this region could support, considering the short season and all the natural obstacles. We had seen all these things growing individually, but had not stopped to consider how great a variety there was.

The local gentry, town officials, merchants, and tax collectors were having a feast at the Guest House, and had invited us, knowing that we all would soon be leaving. One of them remarked to our table that they had reason to be grateful at this harvest festival, as a considerable number of new seeds had been brought up by the first American group that founded the camp, and given to General Fu. A number of the prize exhibits had come from these.

It was a wonderful feast as usual, but some of the local dignitaries did not look very happy, with good reason. In spite of the hectic gaiety of the town today, and the crowds in its streets, Shanpa was fast becoming a dead city. Nearly all of the provincial officials had gradually left to join General Fu. The refugee families had mostly packed up to return to their old homes in the east, while Shanpa's wartime merchants hurried eastward to take advantage of the expected boom. Thus most of the consumers of luxury farm products had moved on, and even if the harvest could all be gotten in with reduced hands, there would be no market for it until transportation was greatly improved. It was too expensive to carry things all the way to Paotou, as the animals would have to be fed along the way, and a man could not make much profit. With its chief means of income suddenly removed along with its prestige, and the promise of

a hard winter ahead, Shanpa was once more a small town with an uncertain future.

We had had many happy occasions there, in its inns and at some of its private homes, as well in prowling around its shops and market. But we were glad to be leaving before hard times set in, so we could remember the town at its best.

20

LO-PEI CHAO

ON OCTOBER 11th, the day after the big celebration, we left Shanpa to return south. Only five of us remained from the original group: Vincent Shekalus, the driver and mechanic, Fred the magician, John Hagan, Chief Pike, and myself. We got off early in the morning, hoping that, with luck, we could make Lo-pei Chao that afternoon and, by starting early again the next morning, reach Ninghsia the second evening.

We were making such good time that we took an hour off at Sansheng-kung to say goodbye to the Belgian Fathers. When we told them that the rest of the camp were probably soon to follow, they were genuinely sorry. In spite of the unfortunate beginning of the relationship, with the confiscation of their mission station, real friendships had grown up between some of the priests and various Americans, and both parties had profited by an interchange of hospitality and the loaning of books. The Fathers were delighted by American detective stories, and they in turn lent us books on China and Mongolia.

They gave us a substantial brunch, and we drove on to the ferry. Everything had gone unbelievably smoothly until we reached the river, but now our troubles began. The excess weight of our load made the truck and trailer sink deep in the flood-softened shore. For a time it looked as though we would be stuck for good, but we had the ferrymen help us unload the two vehicles. Then we put chains on six of the ten wheels of the truck and, having detached the trailer, drove it onto firmer ground. After which, the ever-resourceful Shekalus extricated the trailer by means of a winch, and we finally got truck, trailer, and load aboard the ferry and crossed the river. The whole operation took four hours.

It was late afternoon as we started up the grade that led onto the plateau of the Ordos Desert. As we climbed the successive rises, we scared up a big fox and six antelope, and regretted that we did not

have time to stop for a little hunting. We were making too good time to stop for anything, we thought.

We were just reaching the plateau proper when we heard a loud pop! from inside the cowling. We immediately stopped to investigate, and Shekalus found that the bearings in the water pump had cracked. Without spare parts for it, not even his great mechanical ability could help us. I whittled a new leather washer from a piece taken from a revolver holster, but there was nothing else we could do.

This northwest edge of the plateau was quite high and cut by ravines, making a succession of low hills. Shekalus would drive to the top of a hill, wait a few minutes for the engine to cool, then coast down it, and repeat.

While we were working on the pump the sun had set, and it was fast getting dark. We knew that we must be nearing Lo-pei Chao Temple, and as I knew the prejudice natives of this region had against people who arrived after dark, I decided to go ahead on foot and make the necessary arrangements for receiving the rest. I took Hagan, who was as long-legged as I, and together we made much better time than the truck.

We finally saw the temple at the edge of the plain below us, and paused a moment to catch our breath. Looking back from this last hill we could see the mountains of the Khara Narin Ula that I had come to know so well in the past two months. Extending along the western horizon, they looked deep blue in the distance against the last stages of a pink and gold sunset. Below us to the east, the square white and red buildings of the lamasery gleamed dully in the afterglow. Two or three dark shapes, Mongol lamas or pilgrims, were returning toward it through the dusk. The desert in that direction was a soft yellowish grey, but toward the sunset it was a deep blue-grey with bluish purple shadows.

The light in the west died, and the colors faded. We strode on briskly to the lamasery, where we were received by the Erh Lama, the assistant abbot, who turned out to be the same one who had given me tea on our trip north. He was a little suspicious of us, arriving on foot, but was fairly cordial and gave us his own rooms, moving into an adjoining, empty cottage inside the same small compound.

In a few minutes we heard the sound of a motor, and the truck rolled down the slope toward the temple, its engine gleaming red in the darkness from the heat of the exhaust manifold. The lamas were

somewhat awed by the sight, but they seemed more satisfied about us, seeing that we actually had a truck.

That evening we began to discuss what to do. Shekalus was sure that nothing could be done about the pump, and in this condition it certainly would not be safe to take off across the desert. The only practical thing seemed to be to take steps about getting new parts for the pump. We knew that they did not have any at camp, but we considered going back there to radio for some. This did not seem too practical, though. It would take as long to get back to Shanpa on horseback—assuming we could get horses—as it would to go to Shih-chieh-shan, from where I imagined there was some sort of motor service to Ninghsia City. Ninghsia also had a small U.S. weather station with a radio; and as the parts would have to come through there, we could send for help and be on hand to pick up the things when they came, thereby saving a lot of time.

I decided then to go to Ninghsia, if possible, taking Pike, who was an old radioman. He could send a message from a Chinese station if by any chance the Ninghsia weather station was already closed. The other three would stay to guard the truck. It seemed better to leave three rather than two. It was unsafe to wander around the desert alone, and this way, if two wanted to go for a stroll or a hunting trip, there would always be one on guard at the temple. Meanwhile, as some of the cargo consisted of unused canned food, they would not starve.

It was a difficult decision to make, as I felt that my responsibility was with the truck. However, none of the others knew Chinese or Mongol—I had meanwhile picked up a slight smattering of the latter—and it was unsafe to travel in such a country without being able to ask directions, and how to get food, water, and lodgings.

Having made up my mind, next morning, when the Erh Lama and some of his friends crowded in to watch us prepare our breakfast, I began to negotiate for animals. The discussion dragged on endlessly. The Erh Lama raised many objections. The temple had no horses, he said, and the temple camels were still out in the distant summer pastures. It would take a long time to catch them, too, as they had been set out to graze back in the fifth month (June by our calendar) and would now be fairly wild. Furthermore, even if the camels could be caught, which might take several days, they should not be ridden, according to custom, before the tenth month (mid-

November). Lastly, foreigners could not ride camels anyhow; how did we expect to use them?

I replied to the last remark that I had learned to ride a camel at Shanda-in Sume, and that my intended companion was a good horseman and could no doubt manage a camel. The lamas continued to voice their objections, and finally left without giving us any more assurance than the Erh Lama's parting remark: "Tomorrow we will think of something," he said.

Faced with an idle day, we found various things to occupy us. Shekalus and Pike made one last vain effort to fix the pump. Fred read, and Hagan and I played chess with the set I had been given at Ch'ien-li Temple.

Some of the lamas strolled in to watch us. They seemed very much puzzled by the chessmen. The younger monks picked up the little horses and camels with grins of amusement at the lifelike carvings. They obviously had no idea what the pieces were used for. Finally, an old lama with a white beard came forward, and said,

"Your game looks like *shatara.*"

"Yes, this is a Mongol set," I replied.

He expressed his surprise that foreigners would want to play a lowly Mongol game, and told me that he used to play it years ago, but that there were no longer any sets in the Ordos, nor people who knew how to play it. I gathered from this that even though the Belgian Mission had tried to maintain Mongol customs among their parishioners in their small section of the Ordos, gradual cultural degeneration due to Chinese pressure was causing them to vanish elsewhere in this region.

I was convinced of this loss of traditions that afternoon, when Fred and I went out strolling and stopped to visit a yurt just over the brow of the hill. As the Mongol shepherdess brewed us some tea, I noticed that the hearth had none of the symbolism still maintained in the Oirat yurts. It was simply a fire pit with a ring of small boulders around it, three of which stood higher to support the cooking pot. (The bracing of the smoke holes also followed a different pattern. It had six long sticks, three running from north to south across the opening, and three from east to west, crossing in the middle, with no attempt to render the eight-spoked wheel.)

This was not an isolated instance, but was true of all the yurts we later visited in the Ordos. I was sure that it was a sign of de-

generation rather than a mere difference in custom, as the old foundations for pilgrims' yurts in the dwelling compounds at Lo-pei Chao had the square space around the circular hearth marked out in wood, showing that the symbolism of the center of the tent had once been maintained in the Ordos, as elsewhere.

That afternoon we also visited the halls of the temple for something to do. This lamasery, though relatively small, had one medium-sized temple and two rather small ones. These were all well-furnished, especially as far as paintings were concerned, with complete sets showing the lives of Buddha, Padma Sambhava, Marpa, Milaraspa, and Tsong Kapa. These seemed to form a review of all that we had learned at previous temples. On the whole, though, we found nothing very spectacular. In half an hour we had seen everything worth seeing. It was a dreary place in which to be marooned.

The only bright spot of the whole day was the appearance that evening of a Chinese road inspector. Aside from occasional visits to Shanpa, like the one he had just made for the Double Tenth celebration, he was stationed here. He lived in a larger building in one of the other compounds of the temple, and was supposed to maintain his quarters as a posthouse for travelers.

He immediately suggested that three of us move into the room off his, and as he had a larger stove than the one in the Erh Lama's room, he offered to help us prepare our food. That evening he produced some coarse wheat flour and eggs, and whipped up some noodles and scrambled eggs.

In the corner over his cooking stove I noticed a document pasted on the wall, signed and sealed by Fu Tso-yi. It said that this was a Mongol place, and that soldiers and officials should respect the Mongol people and their possessions.

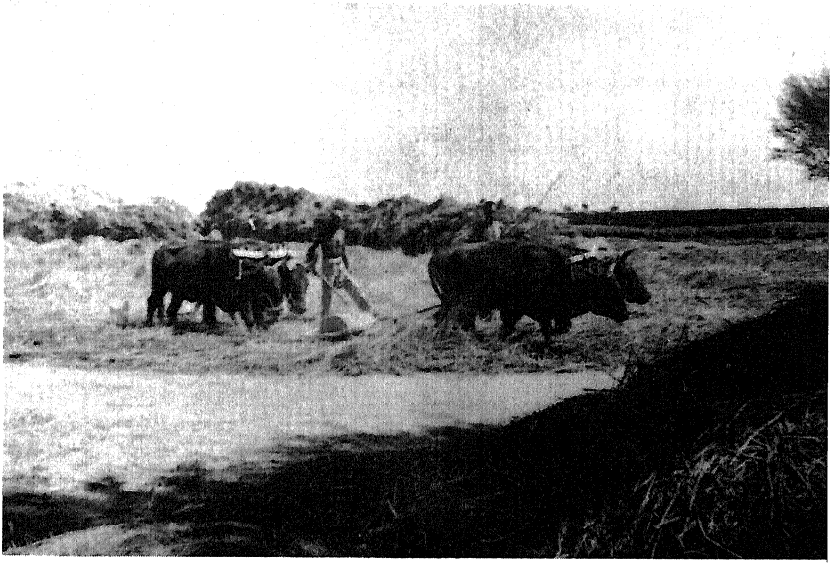
"He's a great man," said the road inspector, nodding toward the signature. Then he added, "Of course he does not mean all that. He hates the Mongols. I hate them too."

"What's the matter with them?" I asked.

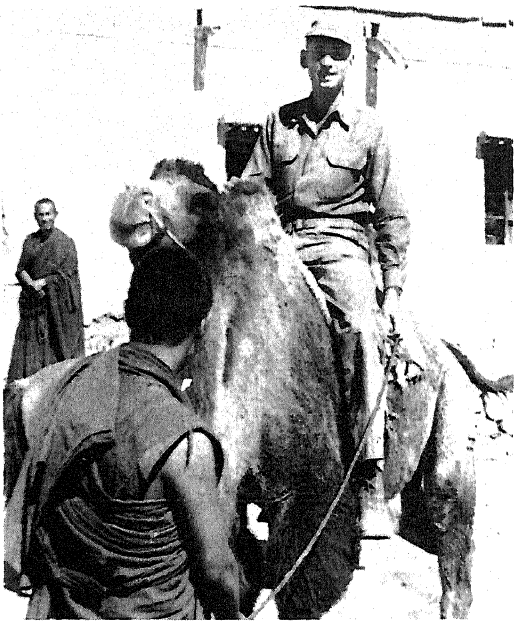
"They interfere with progress. Their princes and dukes are always obstinate when General Fu wants more land, or more soldiers for his army."

"But Prince K'a, the Prince of Dalat, has been very cooperative, hasn't he?" I asked. "Most of the land east of Shanpa was taken from him and given to the Belgian Mission and to Chinese settlers."

Border farmers taking in the autumn harvest.



Threshing grain with stone rollers.
(*Photos by W. E. Hill.*)



The writer hires a camel.

Camel Caravan in the Ordos Region.
(*Photos by W. E. Hill.*)

"P'ei!" spat out the Chinese contemptuously. "He is very weak."

I saw that by this reasoning the Mongols would always be in the wrong. If they did not grant concessions they opposed progress, and if they did, they were beneath contempt. What chance did they have against the "master race" in the face of such prejudice?

When the conversation got around to the lamas, he was even more rabid. He said they were all sex-ridden like the images in their temples, and a bad influence on their own people; that they objected to Chinese colonists on their lands, and thus interfered with progress. Their temples all ought to be looted, as those from Shanpa to Paotou already had been, and their wealth in herds should all be confiscated for the use of General Fu's troops. This had been done in many cases, he admitted.

Aside from this rather annoying prejudice which did not make for good will between him and the lamas, he was very agreeable. With another Chinese who later turned up, he did a great deal to help us.

The following day, the Erh Lama came around early, and escorted Pike and me to a nearby Mongol settlement, in an attempt to arrange for some camels with a wealthy Mongol matron. She was quite friendly but insisted that her camels, like those of most other Mongol families, were still out in the summer pastures, and that it would take several days to round them up and bring them in. She did not seem the least inclined to let us have any.

In one of the intervals between arguments, when she had gone out to think up another objection; we wandered out to watch the rest of her family making felt, assisted by some lamas from Lo-pei Chao and some of the neighbors. As the usual high wind was blowing, they had put up a screen of old felts to form a rectangular enclosure about four feet by ten, the approximate size of the pieces to be made. On the clean-swept ground inside, four men spread goat hairs in layers, wetting down each layer with water sprayed from their mouths, and treading on them to mat the fibers together. When they had managed to make a fairly firm felt rug, they would roll it up and pass it on to seven or eight people outside. The latter would then kneel on the ground in a line, and leaning on the rolled bundle with all their weight, roll it back and forth under their forearms, from elbow to wrist. They laughed and chanted in unison, obviously enjoying the community project. It reminded me in spirit of an old-fashioned cornhusking bee in our own country.

When this deal fell through, we returned to the lamasery, and I spent the rest of the day in a vain series of requests to borrow some of the temple stock. I wanted two riding camels, and a third to carry our bedding. That did not seem too unreasonable, but the trio of rogues on whom our fate depended did not appear to trust us. The small-pox pitted Ta Lama, or abbot, the toothless Erh Lama, our host, and the one-eyed Elder Lama, kept raising the same old objections that we had heard since the day before. I sensed that what they were really afraid of was that we might run off with the animals, which represented part of the temple wealth, and not come back with them. This was in spite of my reminder that they would have the truck and all our gear as security.

When dusk came with the deadlock still unbroken, the Chinese road inspector, who had since come into the negotiations, began to threaten the lamas. He suggested that the solution was to tie up the Erh Lama and beat him, as an example to the rest. This, of course, I refused to do.

Finally they promised to arrange to have horses for us in the morning. We were glad of even this concession, although the road inspector said they were a poor substitute for camels, especially if we wanted to ride across country to save time, because the ill-fed local horses tired easily on sand. We ourselves did not look forward to the small Mongol saddles with solid wooden frames, that are not too comfortable even when well padded with blankets. Still, it was a means of getting to Ninghsia.

Dawn came and no horses. The Chinese began to threaten the lamas again, and they made another promise of camels, with great reluctance. Meanwhile three of us went walking to explore a ruined temple that we could barely make out in the distance, some miles to the north.

Most of the desert we walked over was gravel rather than sand, as the lighter stuff had been swept away by the constant winds, to form the deep loess deposit of North China south of the Wall. This unrelenting sand blast has polished all surface rocks and rounded their edges—even the flints. I found several stone knives near broken bits of prehistoric pottery, so that there was no doubt of their being man-made, but they were so worn that it was hard to discern the facets made by flaking. Any archeologist used to our clean-chipped American arrowheads would doubtless reject them, if

he did not know the unusual conditions that had reduced them to this.

The lamasery was gutted, but before returning we climbed the hill behind it for the view. There I found a half-ruined cairn, and on the flat rock which had served as its base were some strange carvings that looked like hoofprints. They had no resemblance to any form of writing now used in Inner Mongolia, and I wondered if they had been made by the Huns or the Turks, both of which had once ruled the Ordos. It was odd to see the traces of ancient peoples everywhere, when today the same region only supports two or three persons per square mile, and you can go for miles without even seeing a tent.

When we got back, I paid a call on "Toothless" and "One-Eye." I did not mention camels, but spoke of the sacred Buddhist shrines in India. They had barely heard of them and seemed much impressed, so much so that they offered to provide the camels without fail in the morning.

I returned to my room next door and tried to read or write letters, anything to take my mind off the conversation that went on endlessly on the other side of the wall. For days I had heard them discussing camels (*teime*), and I thought that if I were to hear the word *teime* much longer, without seeing a camel, I would lose my mind.

The long discussion about whether or not we would get camels from the monastery seemed finally settled when the Erh Lama came in late that evening to say he had two camels. I went out to see them in the moonlight, and found them tethered behind the main temple. They were very impressive-looking animals compared to any we had yet seen. One in particular had high, firm humps and a thick coat of winter hair. Both were fine animals, but without a third for a pack animal to carry our bedding, we could not leave. I said as much to the Erh Lama.

The next morning when I woke at dawn and went out to see the camels, I only found one. The Erh Lama apologetically explained that the particularly handsome one of the night before was the personal property of the abbot, and he had refused to consider lending it. However, he had already sent out four lamas to look for two more, and we would surely have them by next morning.

"Next morning!" the expression was meaningless. With a hollow laugh I strode off to tell the others about the latest stall. I made a

special effort to calm their anger by reminding them that this was Asia, where things happen slowly, and there was no use losing tempers. But at the same time I was so near losing mine that I felt I had to get rid of a lot of physical energy to avert an explosion.

There was no way to do this at Lo-pei Chao except by walking, so I collected an old lama as guide, and walked the twelve miles to Wojer Temple (Wojer Sume), the chief monastery of the Hanggin Banner, and back the same day.

Wojer Sume was a large, unlooted, and therefore especially interesting temple, and I thoroughly enjoyed exploring its many halls with the young host monk, the Living Buddha's disciple. One of my principal reasons in going there was to see the Living Buddha of Wojer and enlist his help in getting camels in case the Erh Lama should again fail us; but he was away.

In the course of conversation with his disciple, it developed that this Living Buddha was also "Löwung Chimba," the reincarnation of Padma Sambhava, as was the Living Buddha at the Antelope Cave, across the Yellow River! They did not tell me by what feats of theological casuistry they had contrived to explain away an individual soul's rebirth in two bodies. However, they intimated that it had been done because of the rivalry between this banner, the Hanggin, and that of the Alashan Oelots across the river.

In spite of this rivalry, there seemed to be some connection between this Hanggin temple and the Alashan Banner. The abbot's study had on its wall a faded photograph of the last Prince of Alashan with his bride. He was a dissolute-looking older man in a fur cap with a ruby jewel, and a fur-trimmed robe. His bride was a stunning young woman even to our Western taste. She was wearing a sable-edged hat trimmed with golden phoenixes, studded with seed pearls, and had three necklaces of large Korean pearls, over a fur-trimmed dragon robe of gold brocade. The host monk said that she had been a Manchu Princess. This reminded me that the Manchu Emperors had followed the old custom of the rulers of China since the Han Dynasty, giving their daughters in marriage to the princes beyond the Wall, to keep their loyalty. With this charming woman, any prince would forget his predatory ambitions!

The whole monastery here was preparing for a great ceremony to take place on the first of the tenth month, still nearly four weeks away. This involved the drawing of a magic diagram, the *Kalacakra*

Mandala. Three lama draughtsmen were laying out the plan for it in charcoal on a square block of white plaster in the center of one of the temple halls. Their apprentices had already been grinding mineral pigments of several bright colors, and had set them out to one side in small bowls. Meanwhile the throne of the Living Buddha, who was to officiate, was hung with silks of imperial yellow, and before it were placed magic daggers (*purbu*) and other ritual implements, of silver and gold.

As the host monk briefly described the ceremony to be, he gave me a personal invitation to come and see it. As an added inducement—if any were needed—he said that the enormous new chorten, now under construction on the hill above the temples, was to be dedicated on the same day, with games and dances. Very reluctantly, I had to tell him that by that time we would be out of the country, though of course I would have been eager to come. He seemed very disappointed. Perhaps he hoped that the presence of a foreigner or two would give the temple festival even greater prestige in the eyes of his other guests.

When we had seen all the buildings and their handsome furnishings, he invited me back to the guest hall for more tea. As we drank, I turned the conversation to Mongol chess. He immediately pulled out from behind a cushion a small box wrapped in a dirty cloth, and opened it to show me a beautifully carved miniature set. He told me that he had brought it from his home across the river and that he had trouble keeping it, as the Living Buddha, his master, disapproved of so frivolous a game.

"If he were to come back here now and find me playing chess with a guest, he would certainly beat me for wasting my time!" he said, laughing.

It suddenly occurred to me that this remark might offer the explanation for the strong emphasis on the conflict between Good and Evil, Strength and Weakness, etc., that I had noticed in Mongol chess. The higher lamas had probably not approved of the other monks wasting their time over a game, so either they themselves, or one of the offending monks may have introduced the moral element to justify the time spent over the chessboard. Was this the whole explanation; or was it that most, if not all, of the sets I played with in the temples had been made by monastic craftsmen, whose philosophy had guided them in their choice of figures? Both

factors had no doubt entered in, but I felt relieved to have an answer to my question.

It amused me to find that the host monk played very well. If chess was indeed a forbidden game here, and forgotten elsewhere in the Ordos, these lamas must have done a lot of clandestine playing. For not only did my opponent show considerable skill, but his inevitable advisers gave him shrewd suggestions that could only have come from experience.

They enjoyed so much the novelty of playing with a "West Russian" that they tried to persuade me to spend the night and play some more. But I had to get back to Lo-pei Chao on the remote chance that the Erh Lama might produce the promised camels.

Wojer Sume, like most other Ordos temples, was built in a cleft between two hills. These sheltered it from the wind, and gave the same effect of surprise to the traveler as the lamaseries in the mountain gorges; he would not see it until he was almost upon it. Consequently, as soon as my lama guide and I left it, and lost sight of its buildings, the country seemed especially desolate.

A mesa or two loomed in the distance. At long intervals, we caught a glimpse of a yurt down a side valley. Otherwise it was just gently rolling desert, with gravel hills and clumps of sagebrush. A pit viper lunged at me from a bush in the middle of the path, but I noticed him just in time and jumped aside. I tried to kill it with a rock, but the lama behind me looked horrified and urged me not to. For a moment I had forgotten that to his religion even snakes are sacred, because they might be reincarnated souls of friends and relatives who had not been as good as they should have been.

As I tramped down the last slope to Lo-pei Chao, with the exhausted lama about a mile behind me, I saw only the one camel tied up behind the temple. I was disgusted, but feeling too tired for another long session with the abbot, I just plodded on into the room where the other four were cooking supper with the road inspector. Their happy faces surprised me.

"What are you all grinning about?" I asked.

"The camels have come!" they all said at once. "They're just over the hill grazing."

Weary as I was, I smiled too, but I was not entirely convinced after all those false alarms. I just took their word for it, and held out my bowl for some soup.

21

SOUTH BY CAMEL

NEXT MORNING, when I got up at sunrise, the three camels were all there. At the gate to our compound the Erh Lama was superintending their saddling, and another very stocky lama was adjusting their girths. The latter straightened up and turned as I came out. He looked very familiar, and he smiled in a friendly way as though he knew me too.

"This is Dansing," said the Erh Lama. "He brought in the two other camels yesterday. He knows camels well, and he will go with you, as your *lo-t'o fu.*"

Dansing Lama—as soon as I heard his name, I recognized him as the lama wrestler who had been so helpful at the ferry on our trip north.

I was glad that he was to come along, as I remembered from that occasion that he was strong and capable, and a good worker. He seemed to be looking forward to the trip, too. I guessed that he was a man of action and did not find the life of a monk too congenial. In fact, he later admitted that he was forced to be a lama because his family had given him to the temple when he was still a child, but that he was not fond of monastery life and was always glad to get away.

The other four Americans soon came out to admire the animals, and as they were all she-camels, of about the same size, with only minor variations in color, we christened them Billie, Millie, and Tillie.

Billie, the pack animal, had on one of the clumsy-looking pack-saddles consisting principally of two long bags stuffed with burrs. To these Dansing lashed our bedding rolls and musette bags, together with his own bundle of clothing, making a flat platform on which he could later sit. All this gear must have weighed about 80 pounds, and he himself weighed more than twice that amount. But a camel is generally expected to carry a load from 320 to 370 pounds, so this was a light burden for her.

Dansing did all the loading by himself. Chinese caravan men always load a camel in pairs, one on each side of the animal, but Mongols generally prefer to work alone. He was deft with the ropes, and clever at handling the weights to balance them. We enjoyed watching his skill, and again I was glad that we were to have such a capable camel-tender.

Our riding camels each had a couple of felt pads as the basis of their saddles—one against the back of the front hump, and the other against the front of the rear one, overlapping in the middle. These were covered in turn by small saddle rugs, with holes in the sides for stirrup leathers. The Erh Lama and another monk very kindly lent us each a pair of silver-inlaid stirrups from their personal horse saddles. In summer we had seen Oirat and Khalkha Mongols using such saddles on their riding camels, but now in the fall, when the humps were broad and firm, there was not enough room for a saddle tree between them. The saddle rugs had originally been scarlet and gold, fittingly splendid accompaniments to our handsome stirrups; but now they were so old and worn that we felt no compunctions about hiding their faded splendor under a couple of army blankets for our greater comfort.

We had a quick breakfast and got under way with envious good-byes from the fellows we were temporarily abandoning, and last minute admonitions from the older lamas about taking care not to fall off. They were still sceptical about our riding ability, feeling about "West Russians" and camels the way the border Chinese felt about "foreigners" and horses.

To reassure them, I showed them that I could make the camel kneel by tugging on the rope and saying *sok!,* and then make it rise again by shouting *hog!* As in driving a car, the ability to start and stop at will is half the battle.

In spite of this, the Erh Lama, in particular, was very worried when I kept the lead-rope instead of handing it over to Dansing and announced that I was going to guide my own camel. I felt, though, that if an animal that had not been ridden for five months was going to act up, I wanted to be able to control it, as I could not if someone else held the rope. Pike, more conservative, let Dansing hold his rope for the first couple of days, until he felt accustomed to the motion and his muscles had accommodated themselves to the camel's peculiar contours. He felt very uncomfortable that first day,

having been one of the two or three at camp that never went riding, and was therefore not in trim for it.

For the first couple of miles Dansing walked, and the camels ambled along quietly behind him. The motion seemed rather erratic at first, but was not unpleasant, except that since the basis of the saddle was composed of two pads instead of one, it caused an opening and closing effect as though the camel were hinged in the middle. We soon relaxed to it, though, and took stock of our animals.

They were all three handsome beasts as camels go, but some of their features seemed very ridiculous to us. The thick manes at the back of their heads hung to about twelve inches below their ears, and bobbed up and down as they walked, like musicians' wigs. The soft, friendly look in their heavy-lidded brown eyes was completely belied by the proud tilt of their aristocratic noses and their frequent snorts of disdain. But their legs amused us most of all. The front pair with the heavy mass of shoulder fur reaching almost to the knees, suggested an elderly gentleman striding along in golf knickers, while their long, bony hind legs minced along like those of an emaciated spinster in tights, trying hard to catch up. Then those apologies for tails—!

As my back was still slightly sore, I decided not to wear my gun belt, and fastened it around Tillie's front hump. She was not particularly happy about this, and would occasionally curve her long neck back and rub the belt with her nose to indicate disapproval. This was rather disconcerting, especially when she brayed at the same time, expelling a blast of acrid breath. I finally packed away the pistol altogether. I never believed in wearing one anyway, especially in friendly territory; but in Shanpa they were always required whenever we left camp—as a holdover from the time, not long before, when the Japs had only been about twenty-eight miles away, just over the mountains.

We had not gone very far when the rear camel, which Pike was riding, let out an angry snort and struck the ground with a hard thump. Dansing looked back and began cursing. A small yellow dog was following us as fast as his short, bow legs could move. His mashed-in face with grizzled whiskers reminded us of an old-fashioned pug, while his body was that of a dachshund. Dansing explained that it was his own pet, Shippur by name. He said he had

asked one of the other lamas to keep him while he was away, because camels were scared of small dogs, and this one would be a constant annoyance to them. He kept shouting at Shippur to go home, but the dog ignored him. He just plodded stolidly along behind us, keeping out of the sun in the shadow of one of the camels. He paid no attention to Billie's deep groans of resentment when he got too near her, and he usually managed to dodge the occasional kicks of the other camels. Once he got hit amidships and was lifted right off the ground. He yelped once or twice but did not seem to be hurt.

That first day we kept mostly to the main highway, taking short-cuts only rarely. We passed a number of herds of camels, some of which wandered over to stare at us with their usual curiosity, and a few herds of horses at a greater distance. Otherwise the rolling plain seemed deserted. All day long we only passed two horsemen and a couple of Chinese soldiers on foot.

That night we stopped at the small posthouse below the red mesa, where we had stopped for tea on our way north. The two Chinese roadworkers who kept the place were very bored. Since Shanpa had ceased to be the capital of Suiyuan, in August, only a couple of busses had passed there, and their only guests had been a few Moslem merchants traveling with pack donkeys to sell goods to the Mongols.

After supper, Dansing and I went over to a neighboring farm-house-inn, where a small detachment of Mongol cavalrymen were quartered. We were leaving the lands of his banner, and he wanted to inquire about the less familiar country ahead. We found the soldiers busy playing dominoes and knuckle-bone dice, which are to the poor Mongol laymen what chess is to the lamas. I was surprised to see how emotional they got over their games. Their leader answered Dansing's questions, and was extremely cordial. He said they were men of the Ottok Banner, whose territory we were now re-entering after nearly three months.

On the way back to our lodgings I asked Dansing why he had not done anything about feeding the camels. He had merely tethered them to a hitching-post in a bare spot that had no vegetation.

"Don't they have to be fed?" I asked.

"Oh, no!" he replied. "They don't have to eat for the three or four days we are traveling. If they ate anything they would be hard to ride."

I noticed though, that day and in the days to come, that they were always nibbling as we rode along. I still believe that a little evening feeding would have cured them of the annoying habit of constantly jerking on the nose ropes as their snakelike heads dived for tasty morsels of dried sagebrush or thorn bushes.

In the early morning light the mesa was more spectacular than ever. The rock itself was a bright, golden red, while the slanting rays of the rising sun accented the shadows of dark cave mouths, and the symbols around them, carved by prehistoric men and by more recent lamas, who had also vanished. The strange appearance of the countless man-made holes, tombs or dwellings, had caused the Chinese to name it Po-yen-yao, "The Kiln (or mesa) of a Hundred Eyes." I never could find out its Mongol name, because Dansing, like Dunguerbo, was afraid to mention the names of unusual natural features while we were near them, to avoid offending the spirits of the place, and I forgot to ask him after we had left there.

As we started out, we flushed several herds of antelope over the next rise. Altogether they must have numbered several hundred animals. They let us get quite near, then they bounded off across the plain, their white rumps bobbing comically as they hopped over obstructions.

At noon we came to a well where a family of the Ottok Banner were watering their stock. They had sheep and goats, several horses and camels, and a couple of cows. One of the yearling camels had a necklace of sheep scapulas, such as I had seen adorning the rock in the gorge near the Antelope Cave. I asked Dansing about it, and he said that it meant that the animal had been dedicated to the gods, as an offering. It was now a sacred beast, and could never be ridden by man.

The woman of the family, who was saving time by suckling her baby as she watched the goats, had the same headdress I first saw at Shih-chieh-shan ferry—the many small braids plaited into two large ones encased in leather, with the long, flat pendants, and the heavy silver ornaments above.

About this time Shippur seemed to be getting weary. The lack of enough food and water seemed to be telling on him. He collapsed completely when we stopped for lunch, and lacked the energy to go on, so Dansing hoisted him aboard his camel. It was Shippur's first

camel ride, and he did not like the motion. He tried to adjust to it by lying first in one position then in another atop the packs. First he would hold his head erect, and then he would put it down again between his paws. Whatever position he tried, he still shook like a jello pudding and could not get comfortably settled. Finally, when his master vaulted off to walk a while, he jumped off too, although it was fully seven feet to the ground. It seemed an excessive leap for so small a dog, but it did not faze him, and he ran along, happily annoying the camels, with all his former energy.

All day we followed the highway, which stretched on endlessly with a monotonous sameness of scenery. I kept trying to get Dansing to strike west and find the old caravan road that led southeast through the Arbus Ula range. The Chinese road inspector at Lo-pei Chao said that by taking this, we could reach the ferry in two days time. Dansing would not consider it. He was as much of a plainsman as Dunguerbo had been a mountaineer, and was not a man to take a mountain road he did not know. In addition, he seemed especially awed by the flat-topped mountain that had so intrigued us on the trip north. He did not want to go near it. He called it *Orondeshi,* a name Dunguerbo had used to describe one or two isolated mountains of unusual shape across the river. Later I learned that this word means "anvil," and that this particular mountain used to be regarded by the Mongols with superstitious reverence as the anvil on which Jenghis Khan had forged his magic weapons. Dansing never gave any reason for his dread of this mountain, and I doubt if he knew the old legend, but he had somewhere picked up the fear which the legend had inspired.

When late afternoon found us approaching the second posthouse, which was only 80 li (about twenty-seven miles) from our last night's stop, with 120 li more to go before we reached the ferry, I became disgusted at our slowness. Following a hunch, I turned off down a "small road" that looked like a fairly well-traveled shortcut. It led southeast toward the mountains instead of curving far to the southwest to round the range, as the highway did.

As soon as we left the highway, the scenery improved. Several Mongol families had pitched their yurts just over the brow of the first ridge, to be out of sight of predatory-minded travelers on the main road, and to let their herds pasture in the green meadowlands at the foot of the range. We also passed close by a small lama temple,

Rashi Jung, but it was too late to stop to see it, as the sun was already sinking behind the range.

The outcroppings of rock beside the trail on both sides were oddly formed, and eroded. The two principal types of rock were thin slabs of fine-grained red mudstone, which still bore the ripple marks of primeval waters when the Ordos region was an inland sea, and a coarse-grained white sandstone. In some places these alternated in the same formation. The rocks had been tilted at crazy angles by some prehistoric upheaval, so that in places the strata were vertical. The mountains themselves, which rose to great heights ahead and to the west of us, appeared to be great fault-blocks raised toward the north and east, and dipping southward. The strata of light and dark stone across the sheer face of the nearest one were well-defined in irregular patterns.

As we rode along, at a somewhat faster clip, a Mongol rider on a handsome pinto pony crossed the trail some distance ahead of us. He stopped for a moment and looked in our direction, then whipped up his horse and made straight for the mountains, disappearing into what looked like a narrow cleft in the cliff face. Dansing laughed.

"He thinks we're bandits," he said.

As we rode on, we came to the cross trail on which we had seen him, and found it to be a well-marked one leading to the cleft, which from here looked much more imposing. The cliff was split from top to bottom, to form an awe-inspiring chasm. I was sure it was a pass which would take us through the range and save a lot of time. Dansing admitted that it probably was a pass, but he would not consider taking it. He looked frightened at the idea. It was getting toward dusk, and the shadows in the gorge already were dark and forbidding. He was probably afraid to meet the lama demons that he had so little respect for by day.

We kept on straight south over a lesser divide that was quite high, but nevertheless cut off the end of the range, making this route still a much shorter one than the bus road. This stretch was even more interesting geologically. Many veins of coal were visible along the sides of the trail, ranging from a poor, sulphurous variety to what seemed to be a fairly good grade of soft coal; and the highly eroded outcroppings of limestone looked even more weird than those we had passed further back. In this fading light, it did not take much imagination to make out figures of men and animals among them.

As we climbed, we came across an enormous pair of *argali* horns, fully as large as those I had found in Dabatu Pass. They had been painted red and left beside the trail as an offering to the spirits of the mountain. This is an ancient Central Asiatic custom to insure increased fertility of the game. I had first seen it practiced in West Tibet and was surprised to see it still continued here.

Darkness came upon us fast, but we continued on by the light of the moon, which was only two days short of being full. Within two hours we had broken the back of the pass, and soon reached a river bed on the far side, where we found a well. Though the latter was in the center of the river bed, the water was fully fifteen feet down. We dipped some up in canteens tied to camel ropes, to cook our last rations, and after eating, curled up in our blankets on the sand. The night was so cold that the water in the stone trough was frozen solid in the morning, but our sleeping bags kept us fairly warm and we woke refreshed.

Without breakfast, we rode down the river bed which opened out onto a flat plain, where several herds of antelope were grazing. They seemed especially tame in this out-of-the-way spot, and let us approach very near them before streaking away. All morning we rode across this plain toward a tall mountain that terminated a southern extension of the range. Except for an occasional river gully, it was very flat, soft ground, so we tried out the speed of our camels. Their trot was backbreaking, but when they broke into a lope, it was a very easy motion, except for the fact that the motion was forward and backward, and from side to side. I found it easier to rise in the stirrups, or even to post. Dansing was shocked at this technique, but he said with feeling, "You two can certainly ride a camel!" Coming from a Mongol, this was a high compliment.

At noon we rounded the base of the prominent mountain that we had seen all morning. On the west side it was very bleak with sand dunes extending up almost to the peaks, but on the south, streams flowed from the base of the cliff, making a green meadow. As we rode out onto the meadow, I looked up at the face of the mountain.

Halfway up the cliff, and extending almost all the way across it, was the great lamasery of Lo-shan Miao (*Manba-Rasan Sume*). This was the temple we had first seen from the ferry, and which I had then so hoped to visit someday. I never expected to have to visit it on a camel trip.

We left our camels beside the ruined wall of an ancient village at the base of the cliff, and climbed the steep, twisting path to the monastery. At first it seemed deserted, but when we walked into a shrine hall—which incidentally featured life-sized images of a copulating god and goddess, painted blue—a young monk came in to greet us. He was followed by several others who invited us to come to the guest rooms.

Dansing stayed behind for a moment, and when he rejoined us in the guest hall we were startled by the change in his appearance. On the trip he had worn a long sheepskin robe with the fleece inside, girt by a crimson belt. Now he was carrying that under his arm. From a bundle he had carried up the hill, he had taken a handsome robe of orange-gold satin, figured with Buddhist symbols, and was wearing this with a blue silk sash to match his blue silk cuffs. His whole bearing changed to conform to his magnificent costume. He had an air of pride now that we had not noticed before, and the people here treated him with deference. "Clothes make the man" seems to apply even in Mongolia.

After the first cups of tea, they said it would take some time to prepare our meals of mutton noodles, so I took advantage of the delay to visit the main temple, that loomed cathedral-like in the center of the line of buildings.

It exceeded my expectations. Its impregnable position had preserved it from looting, and its small images and ritual ornaments were all complete, while its paintings were clean and fresh, though some were obviously very old. My guide said that the Living Buddha, Galdan Dambei Nima, a reincarnation of the Bodhisattva Vajrapani, was away. But his massive gilded throne and brocaded robes showed that when he was there he must preside in more than usual splendor. Even Ago-in Sume had not been as completely equipped as this one, though some of its things had been finer and its site had been more spectacular, in another way.

After a substantial lunch of mutton noodles, tea, and cheese, we continued on across the parklike meadow at the base of the cliff. With its flowing brooks, its green grass, and its willow trees, this spot really deserved to be called an oasis.

Here we saw a small encampment of Ottok Mongols who had come on pilgrimage to the temple. Two of the women had dazzling headgear. In addition to their braid-plates of silver, they had heavy

silver coronets, bound around with kerchiefs of sheer silk. From the sides of the coronets hung three strings of jeweled pendants on each side, together with large earflaps and a flaring neckpiece, all covered with row upon row of large spherical corals, setting off smaller plaques of silver set with turquoise. Compared with these, the Oirat festival headdresses seemed to have been very plain, though much more tasteful.

At the far side of the oasis we came upon the old oxcart road from Teng-k'ou, where we would have come out had we headed straight for the mountains from Lo-pei Chao. We followed this over a ridge to the bank of the Yellow River. Here the old road joined the new highway, and both cut inland again to pass around a rocky hill. We left them both and continued on down the shore. The river was still quite swollen and a heavy deposit of fresh silt on the bank told of unusually high summer floods. It was soft going, but a shorter route than if we had followed the roads.

Finally we came to the village below the chorten-gate that marked the old entrance to the Ordos. We dismounted at the Mongol inn where I had spoken with the lamas in August, and Dansing left the camels there. Then he shouldered both our bedding rolls and put them aboard the ferry for us.

The clumsy scow was very slow in getting off. It took almost two hours to collect a full cargo, but eventually we got underway with three heavy oxcarts, the oxen that drew them, five riding horses, two mules, and a couple of pack-donkeys, together with a motley assortment of passengers: Chinese cavalrymen, Moslem traders, and a few Mongols, as well as us—not to mention the never-to-be-left-behind Shippur, who characteristically hopped aboard just as the ferrymen were shoving off.

In half an hour we were across the river in Shih-chieh-shan, back in Ninghsia Province.

22

NINGHSIA INTERLUDE

IN CROSSING over the Yellow River we noticed a surprising concentration of strange-looking craft along the far bank, below the town of Shih-chieh-shan. As we drew nearer, we found that they were several large skin rafts. These had been made by inflating sheepskins, which had been peeled off the dead animals with the fewest possible cuts, and then fastened into wooden frames and covered over with a decking of rude planks. The usual type of skin raft, as I had seen them in the Yellow River at Lanchow, are made of a dozen skins, in four rows of three skins each. These were made of twelve to twenty of those smaller rafts, lashed together. They were piled high with rolls of bedding and bales of household goods.

When we landed near them, I asked about them and found that they belonged to refugees from the Japs, who were now returning from Lanchow to Paotou, Northern Shansi, and even Peking and Tientsin. I thought how miserably cold and damp it must be floating down the Yellow River in late October. I saw that most of the passengers wanted to get as far from the water as possible during their stop-over, for they had pitched small tents some distance up the bank.

Shih-chieh-shan, the promised land of busses and good food, to which we had been looking forward for days, proved a veritable hell that evening. We had a very hard time finding lodgings because the few inns were clogged with refugees. Then, after finally getting settled in a private house, we set out, half-starved, for a good meal on main street, only to find that none of the three restaurants in town had any meat, fish, or eggs. We had to be satisfied with rice and a dish of cold cabbage. This was the wonderful Chinese meal we had been dreaming about on the desert!

The physical discomforts, however, were slight compared to our mental ones. An overofficious Chinese captain connected with the notorious Nationalist secret police, who had broken down there on his way north with supplies for the Chinese at the camp in Shanpa,

had made some pretence of helping us when we arrived. But from then on he accompanied us almost everywhere, and when he was not with us, had us watched. Apparently he suspected us because of our unconventional mode of travel—"any respectable American would be traveling in a truck."

When I paid Dansing for our use of the camels thus far, the captain snatched the money from him and counted it, and questioned him roughly about us, having already annoyed us personally by countless inquiries. We turned in early to avoid more unpleasantness, and an hour or so later were wakened by the police agent, whose suspicions had been aroused by the lack of light in our room. He wanted to know if we were still there.

For hours after that we were kept awake, as loud voices in the courtyard discussed the belief that we were probably deserters trying to get back to our own country. The speakers noisily concluded that I was not an officer, but an imposter, since I had not been wearing a formal uniform; and that probably there was no truck broken down in the desert, as we had said. In short, they thought we were fugitives.

The next day, at breakfast in one of the inns, we met two groups of refugees who had come down from Lanchow on the skin rafts. One group were refugees from Manchuria, hoping to return to Harbin. They expected it would take them many months, since the Peking-Suiyuan Railroad was said to have been cut by the Communists beyond Tatung, and disturbed political conditions might make traveling unsafe all winter.

In spite of these uncertainties, their voices had a ring of hope and anticipation at the thought of going home. The saga of these returning refugees, traveling back under conditions almost as difficult physically as those under which they had left, would make a tale of human interest fully as dramatic as those written about their flight. But the outside world, jaded by war news and accounts of mass migrations, would probably never hear it. We hoped that these men would not find disillusionment in their ruined villages and looted homes at the end of the road.

In the course of our conversation, I told them the story of our breakdown, and somehow the news must have gotten out that it was authentic. At any rate, we were pleasantly free from surveillance all morning.

We discovered that there was no bus service to Ninghsia, but that a truck was getting ready to go there, and we could go along as passengers. Several times during the next few hours we visited the place where it was being repaired, in the street, a short distance from our lodgings. When we had strolled into town yesterday the motor was lying in pieces beside it; now it was almost installed.

This was a truck that had left Shanpa for Ninghsia a month before, with one of the first Americans to get away from camp. Like ours, it had broken down in the Ordos, and it had to be towed by oxen out of the desert, while the passengers straggled out on foot or by oxcart. Now, the mechanics thought they might have it ready to leave by noon, and with luck they might make Ninghsia city late that night.

We were delighted at the prospect of leaving this small corner of Hell, and did not mind the sudden interruption when the local mayor barged in on us, about noon, to give us two minutes' notice to roll up our things and climb aboard.

I remarked jokingly to Pike, as the truck got off to a jerky start, that at least we'd probably get a couple of miles out of town in it. I was optimistic. We had only run a mile beyond the city gate when the cylinder block cracked audibly, as the truck struggled to climb a slight rise.

As we started somberly back toward town on foot, the officer in charge of the truck, his face livid with anger at the unfortunate driver and mechanic, was giving orders to hire more oxen to tow the truck on to Ninghsia.

We went back to the small restaurant where we had breakfast, and sat down dejectedly to order lunch. The owner and cook was openly smoking opium on the k'ang behind us. He held out the pipe to us, and when we refused with thanks, he went right on smoking. With greedy eyes he watched the pill smoulder over the small lamp, then passed it back and forth over the pinhole atop the flat bowl of his pipe, sucking avidly until his hollow cheeks looked hollower still. Chinese soldiers and even officers wandered in from the street to look at us, and noticed him without comment. He too did not care who saw him. Obviously, opium-smoking was an accepted thing around here.

One of the soldiers told me that Governor Ma, the ruler of Ninghsia, while outwardly subscribing to the opium suppression

policy of the National Government, recognized opium as an important source of revenue. Thus, although he confiscated it at intervals, to give the appearance of cooperating to suppress the vice, he merely held it and resold it after a short time. A chest of the drug had just been sent to this town from the capital, and the local people were required to buy it at so much per pound, until all was sold. Then the money would be forwarded to the Governor. A cynical officer remarked that probably next week, after enough of the stuff was in private hands, they would announce another general confiscation.

At lunch we reluctantly decided that camels, though slow, were our best bet after all, so after we finished eating I prepared to cross the river to get Dansing and have him bring back the Three Graces. As I ambled along the damp, newly laid silt of the river bank, waiting for the ferry to get full enough to cross, a medium-sized skin boat passed swiftly with the current. I caught a brief glimpse of a pretty Chinese matron in an expensive fur-lined coat, holding a frightened-looking child dressed in silk, and a man whose fine features were partly hidden by an upturned astrakhan collar. A cargo of furniture and household goods was piled high amidships, and between this and the steersman at the stern, stood five young pear trees of the type that have made Lanchow famous for its fruit. I reflected that the War, for all the evil it had done to China, had at least acquainted some of the Eastern Chinese with the "Wild West" of their country, and had made them properly appreciative of some of its products.

My musings were interrupted by the unexpected sight of two new-looking, light trucks, rolling down the road from the desert toward the ferry landing below the chorten-gate. I thought I saw the dark blue of the Navy's heavy winter jacket on one or two of the passengers seated atop the load on the first truck. But the river was wide, and I could not be sure at this distance.

The ferry was now ready to cross, but I decided to forget about the camels until I found out if there were men from camp aboard the trucks, in the hope that they could wangle us a ride.

When the scow approached from the far bank with the first truck, I was delighted to find that my eyes had not deceived me. Five of the passengers were fellows from camp who had received their orders the day we left. They had managed to get a ride on one of a convoy of sixteen Toyoda trucks, captured from the Japanese at Paotou, which were going south with passengers and freight for General Fu Tso-yi.

Though the trucks had engines similar to the Chevrolet, and were copied from our General Motors models, they were not all equal to the long haul. This was the third truck the Navy men had ridden on since leaving Shanpa, and they expected to have to stay here until all the trucks that had broken down in the desert were repaired and had rejoined the convoy.

As the new Americans had arrived in more state and had less obvious whiskers—Pike already had a full beard—they were immediately well received. They moved in with us, and soon a representative of our new friend, the mayor, came to help their interpreter find them meat and eggs which they could take to a restaurant to supplement the menu. They fared royally compared to what we had had on the previous evening.

Next morning at a formal "wine breakfast"—*pai-chiu* always tastes awful in the morning—we met General Fu's representative in charge of the convoy. He gave us his permission to go on to Ninghsia with the other Navy fellows, if and when all the other trucks got repaired and ready to go. I then went on to picture the plight of our desert-bound companions, whom luckily he had met in passing Lo-pei Chao. I must have been sufficiently graphic, because he was so moved that he arranged to send our truck ahead that afternoon, so I could get a message through as soon as possible and shorten their lonely wait.

Shortly after two in the afternoon, our truck left Shih-chieh-shan, and in spite of a half-hour's delay caused by taking the wrong road, we reached P'ing-lo, the halfway point, a couple of hours later. The driver, a scared-looking puppet-soldier from Manchukuo who had been retained because of his knowledge of Jap trucks, wanted to stop there for the night. He seemed to fear that he was being sent down into China for execution, and wanted to delay the trip as long as possible. Urged on by us, the Chinese officer-in-charge ordered him to push on.

We almost immediately regretted this decision to go on, when we found the new main road badly torn up just beyond the town, but we managed to continue by an older one. At sunset, we passed our truck of yesterday, advancing slowly and sedately across the countryside, drawn by seven oxen, with two more plodding along behind as reserves. To have gotten this far, they must have kept going all the previous night.

Two hours later, after dragging through long stretches of soft mud at a snail's pace, we found ourselves still far from our destination, bogged down to the hubs on a newly surfaced causeway, halfway across a shallow irrigation pond. Fortunately it was full moon, and even more luckily, a detachment of General Ma's infantry happened along. For a while they did no good, exerting much effort to lift instead of pulling. Then one of them had a bright idea. He wandered off to a nearby farm and commandeered four oxen—forgetting to bring the yokes for two of them. We unloaded the truck; the two usable oxen pulled, the soldiers and Americans pushed, and she came right out.

The erratic driver, in an excess of enthusiasm at this release, drove on too far ahead, but a detachment of peasants, sent out to help us by the headman of the nearest village, shouldered our bedding and gear and carried them on to the truck.

When we arrived in Ninghsia at midnight, the guards on the wall saw our headlights from a distance, and swung open the huge iron-bound doors of the Northwest Gate. We were embarrassed but delighted to find that, in spite of the hour, the Governor's aide had prepared a large banquet for us with course after course of rich Mohammedan food and plenty of yellow wine.

Full and exhausted, Pike and I were dropped off at the small U.S. weather station—which was luckily still open—so we could send a dispatch the first thing in the morning. The others continued on to the Governor's fabulous guest house, where we had been lodged on our trip north.

Next morning we prepared a long, detailed message for Headquarters in Chungking, having found that the camp in Sian, from which we had hoped to get help, was now closed. Within two days they replied that they were sending the required parts by plane to Lanchow with a new radio operator for the Ninghsia weather station, and that he would bring them by some means up to Ninghsia.

There was no bus service between Lanchow and Ninghsia. Mail from Lanchow was brought to Ninghsia (and on to Shanpa) by ox-cart; but trucks quite often left Lanchow for Sian by way of P'ingliang, and from P'ingliang to Ninghsia by cart would take at least a week. It seemed as though we would still have a fairly long wait, so I decided to return to Lo-pei Chao and rejoin the others, to let them know that help was on its way.

Pike had had enough of camels for the time being, while Edwood Young, the Ninghsia radio operator, had not had a change in months. So Pike offered to take Young's place, while the latter came back with me, bringing his portable sending and receiving set so we could keep in contact with developments in Ninghsia. Then when the new operator arrived with the parts, Pike would leave the radio job to him, and bring the parts on to us in the desert, by whatever means seemed practical at the time.

In order to return north, I found that I had to approach the Governor directly. Since this province was operated as a virtually independent dictatorship, in the style of one of the old warlord states, all business, however trivial, had to be done through the head man. His officials were afraid to undertake anything on their own. Any slip would be punished swiftly and ruthlessly.

Accordingly, at one of the Governor's famous feasts—this one being given for the other Americans who were returning home—I took the opportunity to ask him about transportation back to Shih-chieh-shan. He was very cordial and promised us either a truck or a pair of horses, depending on the condition of the roads. His officials had told him the roads were in fine condition—they did not dare to tell him anything else—but remembering the trouble we had had getting down in a fairly good truck, I suggested politely that a truck would be an unnecessary expense to him, and that we would be just as happy to have horses.

That was quite a feast—and not only because of the vast quantity and excellence of rich foods and wines. Before dinner, the Governor launched out on his favorite topic, the Chinese Communists, by way of a speech to the visiting Americans. It was obvious that he wanted American aid in this domestic problem and hoped that we could exert some influence at home.

With considerable bombast, he told how he had fought the Reds up and down China before the Japanese War, and how he had vigorously opposed any concessions to the Communists and rebels during the Sian Incident, when Chiang Kai-shek's life was at stake. His final remark amused us very much:

"As a last instance of their perfidy," he said, "look at their tactics in war. When my forces were large, the Communists retreated. When my forces were small, they attacked. What kind of a foe is that?" A very smart one, we thought.

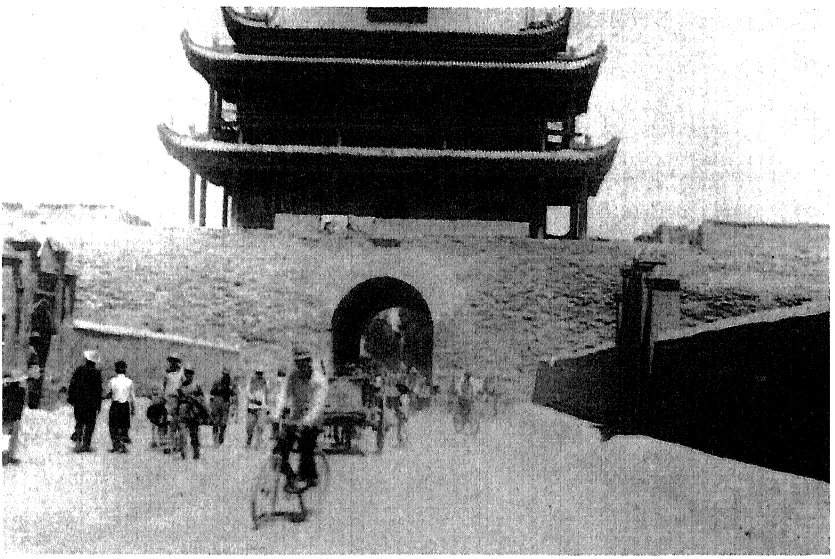
I found the atmosphere of the city heavy and oppressive with its many instances of authoritarian rule, and was glad when the horses came, two mornings after the banquet. They were two fine, large pacers, excellent animals. Unfortunately, they had Chinese saddles, somewhat like a cut-down stock saddle without the horn, but too short to be really comfortable. We padded them liberally with blankets, however, and soon got used to them.

As a less agreeable aspect of the province's political setup, we had to accept an escort of four cavalrymen. We had noticed that no foreigners were allowed to go far in this province without spies, usually in the form of courtesy passengers aboard the supply trucks; however, four seemed to be overdoing it. They were a constant source of trouble to us. They kept us off the new bus road, lest the hoofs spoil its surface, but did not know enough about the countryside to suggest good substitute routes. In addition, they stole some of our cigarettes, and allowed the packhorse to throw the case with our precious radio. Luckily it was not damaged.

In spite of the annoyance of having guards, we enjoyed the opportunity to study the countryside in a less hectic fashion than aboard a constantly breaking-down bus. The land was very poor north of Ninghsia city. The salt deposits were so thick in the fields that had been over-irrigated that the other night when we rode down in the moonlight, the ground for long stretches had looked as though there had just been a snowstorm. Still, even in this area the number of landlords' "castles" was considerable. In one place we counted eleven imposing ones in a radius of about half a mile. Most of the tenants lived within their walls, a sure sign of bandit-ridden country. We saw few temples, even in the towns, but many small mosques of simple, though very distinctive, architecture.

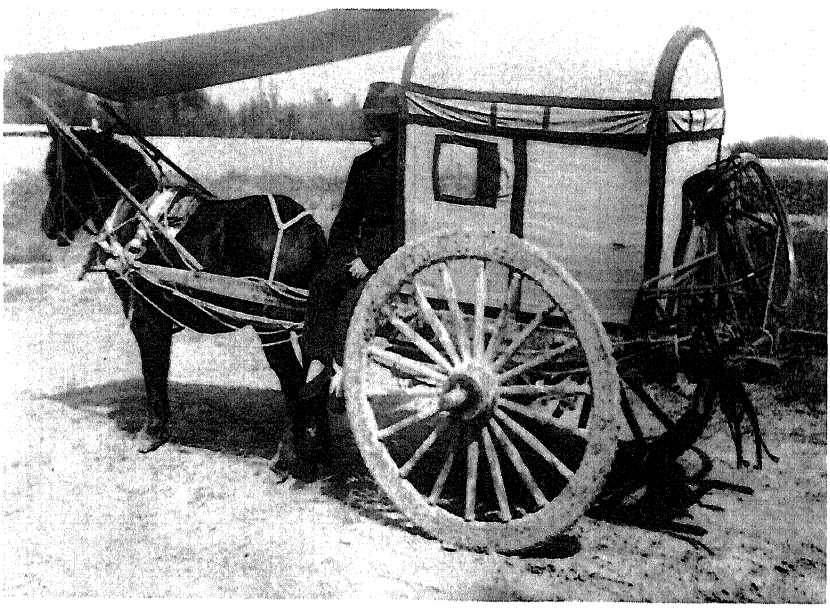
I noticed that the military signs on village walls, and on farmhouses and temples that had been used as barracks, had changed their tenor. The wartime slogans such as "Down with Japanese Imperialism!" had given way to mottoes about reconstruction, such as "Raise the status of the Nation; raise the position of its people." This was probably in response to a directive from Chungking, but the martial spirit was still there. In fact, we now saw more soldiers everywhere, than while the war was on. As in Suiyuan, many had been forcibly recruited since the Japanese surrender to prepare for the expected civil war. The officials gave the explanation that the troops

A Village Temple in Northern Ninghsia.



Ninghsia City, the North Gate.
(*Photos by W. E. Hill.*)

A Village gate in P'ing-lo, Northern Ninghsia.



When his modern bicycle breaks down, a Ninghsia official takes to a cart.
(*Photos by W. E. Hill.*)

were needed to rebuild the roads, but they realized perfectly well that roadbuilding was one of the best means for toughening raw recruits and getting them accustomed to discipline. It was tragic to think that this apparent reconstruction was probably only a prelude to greater and more terrible destruction.

My companion found that thirty miles a day on horseback is entirely too much after several years of no riding to speak of, and when the sun set while we were still about fifteen li from P'ing-lo, he felt miserable. The guards did not know the roads, and in this flat country it was hard to find any landmarks without a moon. We stopped all the late wayfarers we passed, and asked our way, until finally we got on the right one. Soon we came to a few trees, then crossed an old wooden bridge with ornamental arches at each end, and found ourselves at the south gate of P'ing-lo. The high gate tower with its upsweeping roofs silhouetted against the starry sky made an exotic picture, recalling a more ancient China, but we were too tired to fully appreciate it.

The whole town was dark, with all the shops and houses shut. Even Father Kostenoble of the Belgian Mission had gone to bed with the sun. The barking of his dogs as we banged on the outer gate woke him up. In spite of this rude awakening, and our coming late and uninvited, he was delighted to see foreign faces and received us warmly. He fed us well and gave us some delicious homemade liqueurs, while asking the news of the outside world. His cordial hospitality was the only bright spot on the dismal ride to Shih-chieh-shan.

By noon of the second day, the Arbus Ula mountains, with the Orondeshi mesa rearing high above the rest, loomed impressively on the northern skyline. Several hours later, we were riding through what was left of the Great Wall. We scarcely noticed it. Here, farther out on the plain than the bus road, little of the Wall was left. It was just a long, low mound, almost obliterated for considerable stretches, with a filled-in ditch that had once been a moat, on the north side, and more prominent lumps of earth at intervals where the guard towers had long since crumbled away.

By late afternoon we finally reached Shih-chieh-shan itself, a good two hours after we first sighted the strange towers of its mosque. In this clear air, distant objects look deceivingly near, and it seemed to take forever to reach the place.

This time we found the inns somewhat better provided, and we managed to have a good dinner, with our chief guard as our guest. When we had finished eating, our four escorts brought the pack-horse with our gear down to the riverbank, and we paid them off. It was too late to take the ferry, so we hired a small private craft to cross the river in the twilight.

23

THE SECOND CAMEL TRIP

THE YELLOW RIVER had fallen several feet in the week since Pike and I had crossed it, and that evening it was flowing more swiftly down its narrowed channel. The black water swirled around the bows of our small craft and slapped against the rude side planking. Ahead of us the shore still held a soft pink glow from the dying sunset, and when this faded to grey blue, the gate-chorten and the wall in the pass loomed ghostly white against the deep blue sky.

On landing we went straight to the Mongol inn. Dansing was waiting for us there, and seemed as delighted to see us as I was to see him. All the time we were away I had been wondering if he would still be there when we got back. For he was a somewhat impetuous individual, and was perfectly capable of packing his golden robe and leaving with the camels if he got tired of waiting.

We spent the night there, sleeping on a k'ang with fifteen or twenty Mongols of all ages and both sexes wrapped in their skin robes. I had warned Young beforehand that he had probably never passed a night in such a place as this would be, and in the morning he ruefully admitted that I had been right. Every time he woke up, he said, he found the stout matron next to him breathing heavily in his face.

He was much interested in the appearance of the Mongols. Their features and general build, he said, were almost exactly like those of the Eskimos he had met on a trip to Greenland during the first part of the War. The resemblance was further accentuated by their costume. The weather had turned very cold, and all the men were now clad in short sheepskin jackets and trousers, with the wool inside, and were wearing their thick winter boots of dark leather. The women and the lamas had on longer sheepskin robes that gave them a heavy, rather clumsy appearance. The ladies, however, were still wearing their distinctive braid ornaments, which lent them a little charm.

As we prepared to leave in the morning, I was surprised to find that our expedition had acquired two more camels. At the inn, Dansing had met an old friend, Nimbu Lama, a good-looking young fellow of about twenty, from a temple near Lo-pei Chao. He was on his way back from a trip to the Antelope Cave Temple, and Dansing had invited him to come along with us, since he knew the "small road" through the mountains and could act as guide. Dansing still refused to take the Teng-k'ou road, as he said this had only Chinese squatters along it, and he hated even to meet them. I did not care especially, as long as the way was quicker than the bus road and would enable us to see a new stretch of country.

We stopped at Loshan Miao for lunch, and I showed Young around his first lama temple. He had the usual first reactions; awe at the display of wealth that far outshone anything he had seen in other Asiatic temples, and disgust at the number of "obscene" images and paintings, and the degenerate appearance of most of the lamas there.

Starting on again, we rounded the mountain to the east, and headed north toward the Arbus Ula Range. For a few miles we rode along the edge of the plain where we had seen all the antelope, scaring up several of these animals, then we turned off into a stretch of badlands some distance west of our previous route. The hills around us were flat-topped, devoid of vegetation from about halfway up, with sheer walls that were oddly striped because the darker strata had been more resistant to weathering. From a distance, many looked like man-made walls built on low hillocks. Some of the smaller ones had been even more strangely weathered, with flat, upper strata that had resisted erosion, resting like table tops on pyramid-like structures of softer sandstones.

We were aiming for a deep-cleft pass that I assumed was the one we had seen from the other side on the way down, but the shadows began to lengthen when we were still some distance away. Dansing began to look around for a yurt, and Nimbu pointed out a couple that were a short ride to the east, off the main trail.

Their owner was a Mongol hunter, who lived there with his wife and daughter. He received us very cordially, and after the usual exchange of greetings and snuff bottles, he offered us tea and millet. We were lucky not to have come any later, for in the course of the next two hours six other travelers arrived, and while he crowded four into the storage yurt, two had to sleep outside.

With all the guests, there were eleven people at one time eating supper around his fire. The wife and daughter waited until the guests were through, then ate the rest of the meat from the half-gnawed bones. We were a motley crowd, with the two lamas, two Americans, hunters, and travelers.

One of the guests was a very disagreeable Chinese landlord, traveling with a Mongol cavalry officer. He had a thin pinched face that looked even gaunter and more ratlike under his huge black fur cap. His sharp eyes flickered constantly from one person to another, and he was constantly making bitter remarks. It would seem from his conversation that he hated everybody in this region. He was especially contemptuous of the Mongols, and thought to compliment his host by calling him a Chinese. The latter took him aback by saying firmly that he was a Mongolian and proud of it. The landlord was apparently strongly anti-foreign too, being very patronizing toward us.

The Mongol officer must have been a person of consequence among his people, because all the other Mongols deferred to him, in spite of their general dislike for his Chinese companion. The hunter's wife was wearing a simple headcloth of old toweling until he arrived. But before presenting her snuff bottle to him, she readjusted her coiffure to make a better impression.

First she removed the headcloth, and we were surprised to see that her head had been shaved, leaving only a small island of long hair on top that had been braided to form a flat skullcap. Around this she carefully fitted a black tape from which hung two heavy braids of shiny false hair, complete with the leather braid casings and the large silver plaques set with coral, called *shirwilk,* that are characteristic of the Ottok Banner. Then she replaced the headcloth so that the braids looked like part of her own hair. I later noticed that many of the older Mongol women in the Ordos did this, though the younger ones always had braids of their own hair, and merely unfastened the shirwilk ornaments when they wanted to be more comfortable in the informal surroundings of their tents.

We were glad when the disagreeable Chinese and his Mongol escort left for the other yurt as soon as they had finished eating. The tension immediately lifted, and the group around the fire became more convivial. I noticed on such occasions that the Mongols had much more capacity for humor than the border Chinese. Their life

was basically just as hard, if not harder, but they seemed more buoyant, and laughed and joked at each other's expense with greater freedom.

I took advantage of this change in mood to pass around a pack of cigarettes that I had brought from the weather station in Ninghsia. We had always had Chesterfields at Shanpa, but these were Camels, and I was curious to see the Mongols' reaction when they noticed the picture on the wrapper. The first man I passed them to looked the package over with interest, and immediately began to jabber to the rest. Several of the others got up and crowded around him, and the conversation became very animated. I caught only the words *teime,* and *buher,* meaning "hump," so I asked Dansing what they were saying.

"They ask, 'Why show ugly, summer camel'?" he replied. "It has no hair, no humps. Very bad looking!"

I tried to explain to him that this was a dromedary, another kind of camel, that was more familiar to us "West Russians," and that, unlike the true camel of Mongolia and Central Asia, this type had only one hump. The Mongols continued to grumble a little. Dansing interpreted their comments by remarking that it didn't look as though it had even one hump, and if it was like that all the time, it must be very impractical for riding or carrying things. Anyway, it was still a very ugly camel!

Next morning we were wakened about dawn by the sound of great gusts of wind beating at the tent. Early as it was, most of the other visitors had left, among them the Chinese and his escort.

After eating, we got our hostess to pose for a photo wearing her massive coral crown, which she called a *daroluk.* Unfortunately the picture never came out, but at least her posing gave us a chance to see how the crown was worn, and how it gave great distinction to even a rather ordinary-looking woman. Then we gave them a few small presents, and set out toward the pass in steadily worsening weather. Yesterday noon it had been warm enough in the sunshine to ride without shirts, while today the sky was heavily overcast and the strong, cold wind cut through our jackets.

The pass toward which we were riding—by now I was sure it was the same we had seen from the northeast—looked almost as impressive, but very different, from this side. Its mouth was quite narrow, between rather low hills, and behind them the black cleft cut down

through row after row of jagged peaks, ascending one after the other to a stupendous height. On the whole, though, it was not quite as spectacular as the northern approach, since it lacked the grandeur of that sheer and lofty wall.

The pass seemed to have been cut by a river working down through soft vertical strata between layers of harder rock, as the side walls were so steep and straight throughout most of its length. They were very dark, almost a chocolate brown, suggesting basalt. This sombre color must have been the reason for its name Khara Gol, or Black Pass, which Dansing confided to us later, when we were well away from there.

Here and there we passed huge caves overlooking the gorge. I scrambled up the rock to explore some of them, but if they ever had been used by primitive man, all traces had been washed down the cliff from their sloping floors. However I did find the almost perfect fossil of an ammonite, resembling a chambered nautilus, in a limestone boulder beside the trail. No doubt a trained geologist could find much more in this unexplored range.

We were glad that the local bandits were still occupied as members of General Fu's armies, for we came on a number of side valleys that suddenly debouched on the main pass, making fine hideouts for a few armed men to ambush anyone passing by. Perhaps episodes like this had contributed to the fear which the Mongols seem to have for the Khara Gol.

At the far end of the pass, a smaller branch of the main stream had carved another outlet. Between this and the principal mouth, a massive block of resistant stone rose even higher than the north wall of the range, of which it had once formed a part. On its summit we sighted an argali sheep, curiously watching us. Dansing forgot his awe of the pass, and began to yodel to try to scare it. It turned aside its head with the heavy, curling horns, and seemed about to leap away. Then its curiosity apparently overcame its natural reaction at so unearthly a sound, and it stayed on the crag to watch until we were gone.

Almost at the moment we emerged from the pass, to follow for a few miles the trail by which we had come south, the heavens opened and the rains fell. The camels disliked the rain as much as we did, but there was nothing to do but push on. The small temple of Rashi Jung that we had passed on the way down was closed and locked,

and we could find no other shelter. After an hour or so the heavy rain stopped, but a cold damp wind that was almost as bad began to blow from the north.

The trail led up and down over long, low hills, fingers projecting from the main range, and roughly paralleled the bus road, which was out of sight to the east. Occasionally in a valley we would come upon the home of some Chinese squatter, mere dugout dwellings with sod roofs projecting from the hillsides. The soil around them was all bare, and filthy from goat dung. They seemed the last word in squalor. At least yurts could be moved when the surroundings got too filthy.

We saw no signs of any Mongols after leaving the vicinity of the pass until toward dusk, when we began to come across extensive horse and camel herds, and now and then saw someone tending a flock of sheep in the distance.

As soon as darkness fell, Dansing's friend Nimbu abruptly changed our course, and began to lead us far afield, so we could get to his home that night. I had no sense of direction in the blackness, but knew from the fact that we were now crossing smooth, soft sand, instead of uneven gravel hills, that we must be following one of those river beds leading east across the plain.

Several times during the day he had attempted to lead us east toward the bus road, but every time we saw from our position in relation to the mountains that we were getting off the direct route, I had forestalled him. Now, with no means of knowing exactly where we were, he had us at his mercy.

Whatever Nimbu's reason for taking us home with him; whether he wanted company or protection on his way home, or whether he simply wished to show us off to his parents as strange curiosities, he succeeded in his aim. We found ourselves spending the night in a very large yurt—fully twenty feet in diameter—at least thirty li east of our route.

His family consisted of his father, a very old man with a grey beard; two women, both of whom seemed to be his wives; a fairly pretty young daughter; and a half-witted son who seemed a year or two older than Nimbu. The brother would smile at us now and then, and open his mouth wide to let out a pitiful gurgle. The rest of the time he just sat by the fire playing with the end of his cloth belt.

We felt sorry for the family, that they could not have sent this son as their temple offering to become a lama, and kept the strong and handsome Nimbu to carry on their line.

Nimbu's mother fed us a fine dinner of mutton and potatoes, the latter a rare luxury in this region. Then his father got Dansing and Nimbu to ask us all sorts of questions about our customs and ways of life in America. Nimbu did not speak as much Chinese as Dansing, but he was far more quick-witted, and I think he understood my descriptions of unfamiliar things better than Dansing did.

When, as usual, I looked into the god-box to see what sort of paintings and images it held, Nimbu's father asked me what the gods of "West Russia" looked like. I told them that we had only one God—calling him *Burkhan Tengri,* the name the Mongols had given to their supreme Sky God before they took over Lamaism—and said that he was not a man, and no man had ever seen him, so we could not really describe or represent Him. When the young lamas passed on this information, the faces of all three had a half-smile, as though they were thinking that that was a rather unsatisfactory way of explaining things.

I went on to tell them, however, that *Burkhan Tengri's* son had come down to live among men as a teacher, and although he had returned to his Father, we could represent him as men had seen him at various stages of his life. Finally, there was a third aspect of *Burkhan,* His spirit, who brought men great thoughts (I did not know how to express the word "Inspiration"), and that we sometimes paint this as a white bird. I was trying to explain all this in simple Chinese, but I could not be sure how much Nimbu and Dansing understood. After the first sentence or two their faces began to look rather blank, so I did not attempt to go on to describe our other beliefs, and the many sects that had destroyed the ideal of a Universal Church.

Next morning Nimbu's mother gave us a good breakfast of millet gruel. We woke to the sound of pounding as she ground the brown husks off the grains in a wooden mortar made of a half-hollowed log, about two feet high. Then she poured everything into a shallow woven basket and sifted off the chaff. Half of the grain she poured into the pot, and swelled in boiling water to make the gruel. The rest she put aside and Nimbu said she would later mix it with sand and

roast it in the iron *ko*. No doubt it was this process that left the small stones that were so hard on our teeth when they gave us parched millet in our tea.

Nimbu's family belonged to the Hanggin Banner. But this morning, when Nimbu's mother opened a chest in the corner, I noticed a festive crown, like the *daroluk* of the Ottok hunter's wife but a little plainer. Nimbu explained the women of all the Ordos Banners had jewelry of the same general type; but that most of them were a little more reserved about wearing it than were the women of the Ottok, who trotted theirs out on all possible occasions to show off their wealth. This may once have been true, but I never saw such a crown elsewhere among the Hanggin or Dalat Banners, and I think that with increased poverty due to Chinese encroachment, most present-day Mongol families cannot afford such luxuries.

Just as we were about to leave the yurts—this family also had two—a dense fog rolled up. It was very thick near the ground but somewhat thinner above, so we could only see each other's heads as we rode along, and occasionally, as it thinned a little, the heads of the other camels. The bobbing heads and the motion beneath us for once made the overdone description of a camel as "the ship of the desert" seem singularly appropriate.

We traveled west in the river bed until the fog burned away about half an hour later. By this time we were on slightly higher ground, and we looked back to see the two yurts of Nimbu's family not far from the red mesa of Po-yen-yao. It took us the better part of the morning to regain our route to the north. Even then, we failed to find the real trail, and spent most of the day floundering around among gravel ridges, in country that Dansing said he had never been in. It seemed that on this day we had a better sense of direction than he had.

In the late afternoon we came to a ruined temple that Dansing recognized. He said that it had been despoiled by the monks themselves, before moving on to a more auspicious site. From here he said that he knew the way, and that we had fully forty li to go to the next temple, so we had better start looking for a place to spend the night.

Considering the distance we had come, I did not think it could be forty li to the temple near Lo-pei Chao. Young suggested that Dansing was exaggerating the distance because he didn't want to go

on, just as he and Nimbu had understated the distance to the latter's home when they wanted to push on long after dark last evening. This turned out to be true. Dansing's *li* had accordion pleats, and could be stretched or squeezed together at will.

We wondered later if he had known that the nearby yurt, where we eventually spent the night, had a singularly beautiful young matron, a veritable Mongol Delilah, and deliberately arranged things so we would have to stay there. We came upon her as she was tending the family sheep, on a hill not far from the ruined temple, and as he was arranging with her to spend the night at her yurt he could not control a broad grin that was almost a leer.

She would have been beautiful in any country, but her beauty that made us tingle was more than offset by her husband's other wife, whom we met in the family's main yurt, a thin, wild-eyed girl who was coughing her lungs out, with what seemed like an advanced case of pleurisy. She kept wanting to come over to our side of the fire to see us better, which meant that she was coughing almost in our faces. The husband was a gaunt, tired-looking man in his early thirties, who did not seem to have much personality. He spent most of his time, while we were there, sitting in the tent with two old crones—shoibwonshes, like Dunguerbo's grandmother—who seemed to be the real heads of the family. They claimed to be seventy and eighty-two years old, respectively, and looked their ages. It seemed singularly appropriate that we should come across these lama witches at Halloween time.

The eldest shoibwonsh was gaunt and shrunken, but extremely talkative. She sat behind the fire with nothing on above the waist, as had Dunguerbo's grandmother when I first met her. Apparently that is the accepted thing for Mongol witches. Her sister, less dried up, and with a smiling open face that must once have been beautiful, spoke less, but was far more active. Considering her energy and not her first appearance, it was hard to realize that she had reached her three score years and ten, which of itself was a remarkable thing for a Mongol.

Neither of them had ever heard of the symbolism of the yurt, or the other aspects of ancient tradition that were told me by Dunguerbo's grandmother and his courtesy "aunt," both shoibwonshes of the Oirat Banner. Their only functions seemed to be fortune-telling and the sale of paper charms.

They thought I aspired to be a fortune-teller when I warned them that the sick wife would soon die if she could not get medicine. (I was trying to persuade some member of the family to come on with us to Lo-pei Chao to get her some of the sulfa drugs we had.) The older one immediately asked me how much longer she herself had to live. I made some complimentary remark to the effect that she had ten good years at least ahead of her, but she sighed and said something in a sombre tone. Dansing interpreted that she felt she would die this winter. For a few moments she looked even older. Then she recovered her good spirits, and the two of them seemed to be tossing jokes back and forth, while the pretty wife prepared a mutton feast for us.

After dinner we were talking to the two old crones through the husband, who knew a little Chinese. The pretty wife had left to go to the other tent. Dansing soon left too. He came back about an hour later, just as we were rolling up in our blankets for the night. He looked very smug. Next morning the pretty one made sheep's eyes at Dansing across the fire, and he grinned back. The husband did not seem to notice.

When we left the tent that morning the air was freezing, and the icy wind from the north cut right through our jackets. We wrapped ourselves in extra army blankets, until Young suggested that we looked like Arabs, and in that way we kept off some of the blast. Winter had clearly begun, and I remembered Father Schram's remark that up here they only had two seasons, a short summer and a long winter. We stopped for a quick lunch of tea and millet at Shante Temple, only a few miles from Lo-pei Chao, and after a brief tour of its main halls, set out over the hills for Lo-pei Chao itself.

From a considerable distance, we could see that the truck was still there, and as we drew closer, we saw a grinning trio of Americans waiting for us. They said they had known us from the time we mounted the first hill in the distance; for only Americans would hustle the camels along as we did.

24

LEAVING THE ORDOS

THE GRINS of the three who had been left at Lo-pei Chao were not due entirely to our return, though they said they were glad to see us, and happy to know that the parts were on their way. They were also smiling in rightful pride because they had just completed the job of casting a new bearing for the water pump.

The three had not gone anywhere while I was away. They had just sat around and done a lot of reading, but their minds had not been idle. Shekalus suggested that if they had some lead, and could make a mold, they could probably cast a new bearing. The three had put their heads together, and devised a very clever method of doing this. First they fired some thirty bullets from their revolvers into a mud wall. Then prying them out, they had melted the lead out of the copper jackets over the stove, and poured it into a mold made from the casing of a dry-cell battery.

They had just finished putting the pump together, and rigging up a lubricating system for it that was equally ingenious. They had hung an inverted canteen over the pump, on wires, and had pierced it so that it would drip oil gradually.

As soon as they had heard our stories of the trips down and back, and our success in getting the message through to Chungking, Shekalus drove the truck about a quarter of a mile to test the pump. It seemed to work perfectly, but we did not know how long it could hold out. As long as the parts were on their way, we decided to stay there a few days longer, rather than risk a breakdown in a less favorable place. The next two days, cold and uneventful, passed as a hazy and unpleasant dream. Finally, on the third afternoon, a broken-down Chinese truck arrived from our former camp, with the next to last group of Americans aboard. They said that the last were to follow in the morning.

The next day Young got through to Pike for the first time. The portable set had not been working well, and he had been unable to

make connections, though we all took turns cranking the generator. Pike told him that Jack Shearer, his relief, had gotten a truck from Lanchow, and was due to arrive with the new parts at any time.

Almost immediately, the last truck from Shanpa drew up in front of the temple. Some of the Americans aboard it had just come in from a column working beyond Paotou. They brought all sorts of gloomy rumors. Governor Fu, they said, had been forced to give up Kueihua to the Chinese Communists, and now Paotou itself was threatened by an uprising of Northern Mongols with Russian allies from Outer Mongolia. Moreover, a raiding party of "Commies" was supposed to have attacked Ambei on the Wuyuan road, not far from Shanpa.

The last report was one reason for their sudden leaving. The local authorities, and especially the Chinese at camp, had represented the Chinese Communists as little better than bandits, and had warned the C.O. that Americans were currently not popular with Communist groups. The newcomers pointed out that our own position was not too good either, with a truck full of supplies that the Communists could use. If they should cross the Yellow River at Paotou, and move south toward Ninghsia, we would be completely cut off.

These rumors and warnings did not sound too reliable. For example, they said that much-maligned Prince Tê had joined the Outer Mongolian invasion column. I knew that this could not be true, as he represented the hereditary wealth that the Communists would be most anxious to wipe out. As a matter of fact, I later learned that the Outer Mongolians had driven off his herds, taken his sons captive, and forced the prince himself to flee for his life. But we were not in a position there to find out how sound the rumors were, and there was no point in taking risks.

Now we had a double incentive for attempting the trip with the new pump: the possible danger of getting embroiled in a civil war if we stayed, and the advisability of going to meet the parts to save further horse and camel trips, which the arctic weather was making more and more impractical. It seemed a good idea to start off with the others. Then if the new pump did not work, and we broke down again, they could at least report our location to Pike.

On impulse we decided to risk it. We quickly rolled up our bedding, stowed the loose gear, and hopped aboard. Much to our surprise the improvised bearing stood up—one mile, two miles, ten,

and finally fifty-odd. Soon after dark we reached the ferry crossing at Shang-tu-k'ou, and saw the lights of Shih-chieh-shan glimmering across the river.

As we were unloading our bedding at the posthouse, I looked up at the chorten-gate, now black against the starry sky, and thought about how much had happened since we first had seen it three months ago. A shout and some laughter from the Mongol inn below it reminded me of the Mongols I had seen on that occasion, and of the questions that the Chinese attitude toward them had raised in my mind. I had long since learned the answers from seeing the relations between the "Master Race" and the "barbarians," the exploiters and the exploited, and they did not make me happy.

That night, as we lay in our sleeping bags, we discussed the Chinese-Mongolian question in the light of the recent rumors about the Chinese Communists and the Outer Mongolians. At first the issues and the possible results seemed very confused, but eventually we came to some conclusions:

If the Chinese Communists took over Chahar and Suiyuan, as they seemed likely to in time, they were, for all their talk, still Chinese with a contempt for aborigines and "barbarians." The way they had treated the semi-Tibetan tribesmen of northern Yunnan and western Szechuan during their famous (or notorious) Long March proved that. Unless their attitude had greatly changed, the Mongols would find themselves just as badly off.

What if the Russians succeeded in adding this region to "Independent" Outer Mongolia? They were nominally sympathetic toward smaller minority groups, and boasted of encouraging the perpetuation of old Asiatic traditions—at least those that did not interfere with the new economic system. But even though it might be desirable for all the Mongols to be reunited once more in a common destiny, the Inner Mongolians would undoubtedly be forced to pay for possibly greater security at the expense of an even greater loss of their much-prized freedom.

If, on the other hand, conditions were to remain as they were, with the Inner Mongolians under the control of such warlords as Fu Tso-yi and Ma Heng-kuei, their future looked very bad indeed. The culture of the Mongols as we had observed it on our trips seemed rapidly passing. The new deserts at the foot of the Khara Narin Ula

range showed how sheep and goats can ruin pasture land just as much as poor farming can, if the land is overgrazed and not allowed to rest now and then. And so little good pasture remains to the Mongols in Inner Mongolia that what is left must be used to the utmost. With this economic pressure rapidly increasing, the remaining Mongol Banners of Inner Mongolia might soon be forced to follow the recent example of the Dalats, and give up their old ways of life to take up the civilization of the encroaching Chinese at least in part, thus losing their own identity.

Even the borrowed Tibetan culture of Lamaism that has had so much influence over the Mongols in the past three hundred and fifty years was fast passing. Once vastly wealthy, the looted lamaseries—and this means all but a few like Ago-in Sume and Lo-shan Miao—are no longer so; even by Asiatic standards, in which pomp and glitter count for more than less showy assets because of the emphasis on "face." Large monasteries like Shandagu Miao and Shanda-in Sume require vast amounts for upkeep; and as the Mongol laymen—nobles as well as hunters and herdsmen—become steadily poorer, they could no longer afford to support the temples, much less repair the damages suffered during the War even in areas not occupied by the Japanese. This would not decrease the demands of the lamas, however, and the temples would doubtless continue to pull down the living standard of the Mongols in their decline.

We could only hope that the future would provide a solution that would permit the Mongols to maintain their eminently well-balanced way of life, so well adapted to their environment, and at the same time enable them to raise their standard of living to include medical care and better living conditions in general. This could be accomplished under a benevolent Chinese government that would have the foresight to allow the Mongols either outright freedom under a system of federation, or at least a greater measure of self-rule under Mongol rulers who would understand their problems—and this does not mean absentee princes, like the wastrels who have signed away tribal rights for personal profit. Such a government would also have to assist the Mongols in returning to pasture land the marginal areas that are obviously not fit for farming, and in encouraging better, less haphazard markets for their dairy products and hides. It would probably also have to break the temporal power of the Lama Church —without destroying it as an institution.

Even then, such a progressive program for the Mongols seemed too much to expect. If the long-promised Coalition Government for China could ever be achieved, perhaps that would be idealistic enough to undertake it. But with all the preparations for civil war that we had seen in the Northwest, and the increasing tendency of both the Kuomintang and the Communists to crush down the liberal elements with their brutal secret police systems, the prospects of progressive reform in the frontier regions seemed very remote.

This was what passed through our minds that night. We did not foresee, could never have imagined, what actually did take place within four years. Governor Fu, after gaining some nominal victories against the Communists with aid of his Mongol cavalry, was appointed the Nationalist Commander of North China; whereupon he proceeded to sell out Peking and the surrounding areas to the Reds without a fight. In return for this, his late enemies awarded him high positions in their own government, including the executive control over Suiyuan Province, with a prominent voice in the future destiny of the Mongols, whom he still despises. A few months later, General Ma of Ninghsia, after many public announcements of heroic defense, likewise sold out to the Communists; and with all protection gone, the Belgian fathers were forced to flee from their great holdings in Ninghsia and Suiyuan.

The Bamboo Curtain has settled down tightly over Inner Mongolia, and we have no means of knowing what is actually going on there. It may be years before any Occidental is admitted to see. But considering the type of Chinese still in control of that area, and the new teachings that exalt economic progress for the rulers above individual welfare for the ruled, it does not seem as though the families and Banners of Dunguerbo, Dansing, and all the other Mongols who had been so hospitable to us in their tents and temples, will soon enjoy that peace, security, and freedom from exploitation which we had hoped they would regain.

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